

CONVERTED TO USEFULNESS: THE CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NARRATIVE
PATTERNS IN THE MEMOIRS OF AMERICAN MISSIONARY WIVES FROM 1814 TO
1842

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Abstract

This work examines the entrance of women to the American missionary endeavor as an act of contextualization, rather than subversion, of the Christian message for the woman's sphere. The first missionary wives opened new doors for women not out of a desire to reject antebellum evangelical ideas concerning gender roles, but rather out of a desire to submit to what they perceived to be God's will according to the social context within which they lived.

The evidence for this study comes from the five early 19th century memoirs of Harriet Newell, Ann Judson, Myra Allen, Harriet Winslow, and Eliza Jones, as well as numerous accounts of evangelical conversion from the 17th and 18th centuries. Significant research among secondary sources on the topics of evangelical conversion, antebellum reading and writing practices, the woman's sphere, and New Divinity theology is also included.

The thesis begins by examining the literary patterns and traditions of the evangelical conversion narrative, starting with the Puritans and concluding with the rise of antebellum evangelical publishing. It addresses the ways antebellum women in New England engaged the evangelical textual community from within their "sphere," as well as their engagement with ideas of benevolence, millennialism, and mission, creating a language of "usefulness." The thesis then proceeds to study the memoir of Harriet Newell as an example of women's literary engagement with usefulness and as the original missionary wife memoir. The study concludes by looking at four missionary wife memoirs which modeled themselves on Newell's memoir, providing an important glimpse into the contextualization of conversion and search for usefulness which led American women into the missionary cause.

A key question this thesis poses is how the conservative environment of antebellum evangelicalism opened doors for women to participate in the "public" cause of foreign missions. The answer centers on the writings of the first missionary wives as they sought spiritual fruit from their conversions in the idea of usefulness, enabling them to contextualize the Christian message and its antebellum emphasis on Christian action for the particular realities of their gendered contexts.

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Introduction

The wife of a Missionary, when influenced by the Spirit of Christ, gives still more remarkable evidence of self-denial and devotion; evidence, I say, more remarkable; because for her to forsake friends and country, is an instance of greater self-denial. The tie, which binds her to her relatives and her home, is stronger. Her mind is more delicate in its construction; more sensible to the tenderness of natural relations, and to the delights of domestic life. When, therefore, she forsakes all, for the name of Christ, she makes a higher effort; she offers a more costly sacrifice; and thus furnishes a more conspicuous proof, that her love of Christ transcends all earthly affection.¹

With these words, Leonard Woods remembered Harriet Newell, the nineteen-year-old missionary wife who died at sea shortly after giving birth to her first child. He did not speak anything untoward for his early 19th century hearers; no person in the audience would have been surprised by his assumption that due to the weaker nature of her sex, a woman participating in the new missionary cause was remarkable. Instead, what would have stood out to contemporary hearers was Woods's later assertion that Harriet had not in fact thrown her life away – that her participation in the cause was beneficial and useful, despite the limitations of her sex. Against detractors of the missionary cause, particularly women's participation in it, Woods declared:

But do you not applaud the conduct of a man, who goes to the earth's end to gratify a worldly passion? And can you think it reasonable to make greater sacrifices for *self interest* than for the *kingdom of Christ*? “*Threw herself away?*” – What? Does a devoted Christian who, for the love of Jesus, forsake all that she has, to receive an hundred fold here, and life everlasting in heaven, *throw herself away?*²

In the opening decades of the American missionary cause it was by no means a settled matter that women should participate, and the conflicting ideas that Woods

¹ Leonard Woods, D.D. *A Sermon, Preached at Haverhill, Mass. In Remembrance of Mrs. Harriet Newell, Wife of the Rev. Samuel Newell, Missionary to India. Who Died at the Isle of France, Nov. 30, 1812, Aged 19 Years. To Which Are Added Memoirs of Her Life* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1814), 7, Archive.org, accessed 16 September 2016.

² Ibid., 16.

expressed concerning Harriet Newell demonstrated precisely why. If women were less naturally capable of the sacrifices required for the work, ought they not stay home? Yet Woods was confident in his assertion of the necessity and admirableness of the women who left America's shores. This paper hopes to examine the answers women gave in response to this conundrum, the communication of those reasons to the American evangelical community, and why and how American evangelicalism eventually accepted women's reasons for participating in the missionary cause.

The opening decades of the 19th century witnessed not only the establishment of a missionary movement in America, but a missionary movement that compelled women to participate as much as – if not more than – men. In the midst of spiritual revival, women in New England were motivated to participate in the expansion of the Christian religion, creating a particular sense of calling relevant and specific to their gendered context. Believing they ought to seek lives of usefulness, New England women married men leaving for mission fields overseas in decisions that demonstrated not only agency, but a deep belief in divine calling and responsibility.

Insight into the lives and decisions of the first female participants in the missionary cause must come primarily from the memoirs which were published to memorialize their deaths. For the first three decades of female participation in American missions, very few sources exist apart from these memoirs.³ To learn about the ways women first encountered the missionary cause of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU),

³ According to Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 12, 342, 346, 483, 744, no archival material exists for the writings of Harriet Newell, Myra Allen, Harriet Winslow, and Eliza Jones. Only a few of Ann Judson's letters remain in the archives of the American Baptists Historical Society in Rochester, New York.

considered their own participation in the work, and decided to commit to life overseas, we must rely on what was preserved of their personal writing in the edited and published works which sought to make them religious exemplars. This study looks at five such memoirs, namely those published between the years 1814 and 1842 to honor the lives of Harriet Newell, Ann Judson, Myra Allen, Harriet Winslow, and Eliza Jones.⁴

To understand these memoirs and what they tell us about the first generation of American missionary wives, this paper provides an extensive study of the literary patterns common to all five memoirs and examines the literary tradition and social context which shaped them. In particular, I look at the importance of each woman's conversion narrative and the resulting desire for "usefulness" with which they justified their commitment to the missionary cause. Many scholars have noted the ways in which women's participation in the missionary cause opened up new opportunities for women's work in antebellum America.⁵ Additionally, some scholars have mentioned the language

⁴ In total, I have so far identified seventeen memoirs of ABCFM or Baptist missionary wives published between 1814 and 1880, enough to comprise a subgenre of 19th century evangelical memoir. I have chosen to specifically examine the five mentioned above due to the historic and literary significance of Harriet Newell and the chronological proximity and literary similarity of Judson, Allen, Winslow, and Jones's memoirs to Newell's prototype. Though I have not yet thoroughly studied them, significant changes can be seen in the literary patterns of the memoirs as the genre progressed through the 19th century. Most notably, the latter memoirs cease to rely primarily on the personal writings of their subjects and increasingly utilize the voice of a narrator, thus becoming more "novelistic" in style. Additionally, the personal conversion narratives of the subjects recede in clarity and prominence. See bibliography for complete list of these seventeen memoirs.

⁵ R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980). Joseph A. Conforti, "Mary Lyon, the Founding of Mount Holyoke College, and the Cultural Revival of Jonathan Edwards," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter, 1993): 69-89. Lisa Joy Pruitt, *A Looking-Glass for Ladies: American Protestant Women and the Orient in the Nineteenth Century* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2005). Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo, *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996); "The Influence of American Missionary Women on the World Back Home," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter, 2002): 59-89. Barbara Welton, "She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women's Missionary Careers in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (Winter, 1978): 624-638.

of usefulness, with a few giving it fuller attention.⁶ However, a close read of the ways missionary wife memoirs connected their subjects' usefulness to their conversion experiences has not yet been conducted.

Furthermore, current scholarship has yet to fully explain exactly how and why the particular experiences and motivations of the first missionary wives replicated themselves, leading to a broad movement among women to participate in the missionary cause. Why did female participation in the American missionary effort not cease or diminish after the departure of the first missionary wives and the wide publicity of Harriet Newell's death? How did a few individual women's conversion experiences, which propelled them to seek usefulness, replicate themselves in the lives of scores of women across New England society? Surely the answer is complicated and multifaceted; however, I hope to demonstrate that the literary traditions surrounding the conversion narrative along with the context of the antebellum "evangelical textual community"

⁶ Many scholars have mentioned the language of "usefulness" in their scholarship, yet without fully examining the term in depth. Works which briefly mention the language used by women include Joanna B. Gillespie, "'The Clear Leadings of Providence': Pious Memoirs and the Problems of Self-Realization for Women in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer, 1985): 197-221; Mary Kelley, "'A More Glorious Revolution': Women's Antebellum Reading Circles and the Pursuit of Public Influence," *New England Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (June 2003): 163-196; Lisa Joy Pruitt, *A Looking-Glass for Ladies: American Protestant Women and the Orient in the Nineteenth Century* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2005); Barbara Welter, "She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women's Missionary Careers in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (Winter, 1978): 624-638. A few scholars have given the term more thought, studying its theological roots and usage by early American women. These few works include Anne M. Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Oct., 1978): 62-80, and Genevieve McCoy, "The Women of the ABCFM Oregon Mission and the Conflicted Language of Calvinism," *Church History*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Mar., 1995): 62-82, as well as brief mention in Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996). Additionally, though the term has been examined in connection to 18th century masculine virtue in such studies as Lisa Wilson, *Ye Heart of a Man: The Domestic Life of Men in Colonial New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), little scholarship has yet been conducted to fully study the changes the term underwent in order become widely used within early 19th century feminine spirituality, though possible groundwork was laid in Ruth Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11 (Fall 1987): 37-58.

created a ripe environment for women to engage with the Christian message of missions and to contextualize it for themselves according to their gendered realities.⁷ I suggest that the experiences and decisions of the first American missionary wives were replicated in the lives of scores of other women precisely because of the powerful intersection of the literary tradition surrounding conversion narratives and the theological environment which encouraged women to implement what they read and learned into their lives.

In this study, my goal is to help bridge the scholarship arising from the fields of women's studies and missions history. On the one hand, many feminist historians have examined the impact of the missionary movement on early American womanhood, relying mostly on social history methodologies and interpretations of liberation, and often overlooking the conservativeness with which many of the initial missionary wives engaged religion and gender. On the other hand, missiologists have taken the theological concepts and motivations behind the movement quite seriously, but have for the most part neglected to study the earliest female participation and how such involvement helped to shape and develop American missions. When missions history has examined female participation, it has focused on later 19th century movements, by which time women exerted significantly greater independence and force. There is need to synthesize these two perspectives in order to fully understand the significance and impact of the earliest missionary wives. By examining their writings and taking seriously the literary force with which their memoirs were published and received, the first missionary wives present us with a movement that contextualized a traditional understanding of the Christian message according to its ideas on gender. Where feminist historians have found only nascent

⁷ Influenced by the scholarship of Candy Gunther Brown, I use the term "evangelical textual community" to refer to a complex web of reading and writing practices used by evangelicals to foster personal spiritual growth and influence American society.

liberation at best, and missions historians have overlooked any theological depth demonstrated by the movement's earliest female participants, I hope to demonstrate that by contextualizing the Christian message for themselves and according to their community's understanding of the world, the initial missionary wives enacted a translation of the gospel message for 19th century womanhood, both transforming and maintaining the social realities within which they found themselves.⁸

At the heart of the American missionary cause stands the memoir of Harriet Newell, which proved crucial for the contextualization of the conversion narrative for the antebellum woman's search for usefulness. Perhaps one of the most forgotten figures of early America, Harriet Newell served the cause of foreign missions only briefly, but was memorialized upon her death in a remarkable memoir. Bringing her life and death to the attention of the American public, the work was vastly important not only for inspiring scores of women to partake in missionary activity, but also for justifying the entire American missionary cause to a skeptical audience. Just as Jonathan Edwards's *Life of David Brainerd* sparked interest in Christian missionary activity and motivated evangelical Christians to take up the call, Leonard Woods's memoir of Harriet Newell ensured the cause did not flounder in its nascent years, instead fanning the flames by supplying the cause with its first "martyr."⁹ To remember the literary impact of David Brainerd on the American missionary effort but fail to remember Harriet Newell's influence only demonstrates the quickness with which evangelical history forgets even its

⁸ Definitions and understandings of "contextualization" are myriad and vary greatly according to discipline. For this study, I have been heavily influenced by the definitions of contextualization as cultural translation of the Christian message arising from such scholars as Andrew F. Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Philip Jenkins. See Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

⁹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 21.

most eminent women. Published with parallel success to David Brainerd's memoir during the important opening decades of the American missionary cause, Harriet Newell's memoir serves as the linchpin between evangelical literary traditions of earlier centuries and the widespread response by antebellum evangelical women to the missionary call.¹⁰

This paper looks at four key components to understanding the role of the missionary wife memoir in antebellum America: the literary tradition of the conversion narrative; the antebellum social and religious context; the significance of Harriet Newell's memoir; and four examples of missionary wife memoirs that followed suit. In Chapter 1, I examine the literary pattern and tradition of the evangelical conversion narrative. I draw heavily on the work of D. Bruce Hindmarsh, who has studied the pattern from its inception among the British Puritans, and of Patricia Caldwell, who writes about the transposition of such narratives across the Atlantic into the American context. I also engage the work of Candy Gunther Brown, who has studied the role of conversion narratives and memoirs as they pertain to antebellum evangelical publishing. Along with these scholars, I argue that the conversion narrative was a well maintained literary pattern, yet adaptable to changing social contexts – in other words, the pattern remained even when the plot changed. In Chapter 2, I address the new social context the missionary wife memoir drew upon for its plot. I look at the ways antebellum women in New England engaged the evangelical textual community from within their “sphere” and the new importance reading and writing were given for women's work and identities. I also look at the ways increased women's education and literacy in New England enabled

¹⁰ Mary Kupiec Cayton, “Canonizing Harriet Newell: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement in New England, 1800-1840,” in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*, edited by Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo, 69-93 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 85.

them to engage for themselves the evangelical ideas of benevolence, millennialism, and mission, as these were important for shaping the way the missionary wives understood and wrote about their conversions and usefulness. In Chapter 3, I examine Harriet Newell's memoir, hoping to highlight the patterns and context discussed in the first two chapters and establish the memoir as a significant part of evangelical literature. I draw upon the research of Mary Kupiec Cayton, who has attempted to demonstrate the forgotten importance of the memoir. Finally, in Chapter 4, I look at the "genre" which modeled itself off of Harriet Newell's memoir. Strongly echoing their forebear, missionary wife memoirs became popular among evangelical publishers and serve as important glimpses into the continuing contextualization of conversion and search for usefulness that led American women into the missionary cause.

I intend to demonstrate that when understood as a contextualization of the conversion narrative tradition into the antebellum woman's sphere, Harriet Newell's memoir helps to explain the way evangelical women were internally compelled to participate in the missionary cause not as an act of social subversion, but as an act of religious contextualization within their gendered worlds. I propose that the first missionary wives opened new doors for women not out of a desire to reject evangelical ideas concerning gender roles, but rather out of a desire to submit to what they perceived to be God's will according to the social context within which they lived.

Chapter One: The Conversion Narrative – Its Shape, Literary Contexts, and Significance

By the publication of Harriet Newell's memoir in 1814, the evangelical memoir was well established as an American literary genre. Published to hold up the exemplary lives of those worth emulating, evangelical memoirs incorporated an important narrative pattern familiar to all contemporary evangelical Christians – the conversion narrative. From its initial establishment within the earliest Puritan communities until its utilization within the missionary wife memoir, the conversion narrative maintained certain characteristics through several centuries. The contextualized plot or argument that ensued from a conversion narrative changed along with the changing social contexts – Puritan, early evangelical, and antebellum spiritual concerns varied – but all shared the common foundation of a narrative that recounted an individual's experience of saving grace. Introducing a memoir with this familiar and long held narrative form was significant for establishing the spiritual authority and exemplariness of the memoir's subject, as well as for establishing the pedagogical reasons readers should emulate the subject's example. Though the ensuing plots changed according to America's changing religious and social contexts, the vitality and familiarity of the conversion narrative remained the foundation for the argument the subject's life was used to make.

A. Puritan Origins and Church Membership

Not all Christians have believed in the need to recount their experience of the Christian faith in narrative form. As D. Bruce Hindmarsh has pointed out, to do so requires individual self-consciousness and introspection. Though many have argued this

propensity was initiated by the Reformers and its heritage can certainly be traced back through the ages to Augustine, Hindmarsh argues the autobiographical moment did not arrive for Christianity until the early modern period of the North Atlantic world. Early Puritan theology particularly relied on the idea of personal conversion, and from it a narrative form developed and became firmly rooted in the spiritual consciousness of the evangelical world.¹ The conversion narrative developed out of the “heightened sense of self-consciousness and individuality” of the early modern world, and as such became a pattern that reasserted itself over many generations.²

Established in the nonconforming churches of England and indebted to such late 17th century works as Richard Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted* and John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, accounts of individuals turning from their natural states of sin to states of grace were at the heart of this burgeoning narrative form.³ Though Puritan morphologies of conversion were important theologically, the conversion narrative as a literary genre was less concerned with a series of steps and more interested in the shape of an individual’s experience. As such, it could be and was embraced across the entire religious community, regardless of an individual’s educational level or theological acumen.⁴

The conversion narrative as established by the Puritans was both a literary and oral tradition, first centered on the recounting of personal experience in order to gain church membership. Spanning all levels of society, conversion narratives were articulated

¹ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, “Introduction,” in *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

² D. Bruce Hindmarsh, “Patterns of Conversion in Early Evangelical History and Overseas Mission Experience,” in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, edited by Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 71-81.

³ Ibid., 72-73.

⁴ Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 39-41, 67, 93.

by both the highly educated and the barely literate, and by both men and women.

Identifying the U-shape pattern of the narrative form that became so fundamental to articulating one's experience, Hindmarsh writes:

...it is possible to identify a common U-shaped pattern that begins with serious religious impressions in childhood, followed by a descent into "worldliness" and hardness of heart, followed by an awakening or pricking of religious conscience, and a period of self-exertion and attempted moral rectitude, which only aggravates the conscience and ends in self-despair. This self-despair, paradoxically, leads to the possibility of experiencing a divinely wrought repentance and the free gift of justification in Christ. Forgiveness of sins comes thus as a climax and a psychological release from guilt and introduces ideally a life of service to God predicated on gratitude for undeserved mercy.⁵

The earliest examples of the conversion narrative in America point to the importance of the church and religious community. Most notable is the collection of fifty-one accounts given at the First Church of Cambridge, Massachusetts, between 1637 and 1645.⁶ These individual accounts were given orally by those petitioning for membership before the congregation, and were additionally recorded in written form by First Church's minister, Thomas Shepard. As to be expected of early conversion narratives given for church membership, they demonstrate the experiences individuals within the congregation repenting of sin and professing faith.⁷ Importantly, they also demonstrate that from the beginning of the development of its literary form, the conversion narrative was intended for the spiritual benefit of others, not simply for the purposes of the individual. As Thomas Shepard believed, the public recounting of his congregation's experiences was intended not to be "odd" or "groundless," but rather, "...such as may be of special use unto the people of God, such things as tend to show, Thus was I humbled, then thus I was called, then thus I have walked, though with many weaknesses since; and

⁵ Hindmarsh, "Patterns of Conversion," 73.

⁶ Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative*, ix.

⁷ Ibid., 66-67.

such special providences of God I have seen, temptations gone through; and thus the Lord hath delivered me, blessed be his name, etc.”⁸ Narrating a person’s spiritual experiences was not for the individual’s benefit alone, but rather for the building up and encouragement of the “people of God.”

As some scholars have noted, the narrative pattern of conversion was easily recontextualized to changes brought about by Puritan migration and generational change. For example, Patricia Caldwell has masterfully examined the changing context of the conversion narrative as people left England for North America. As migrants exchanged the restrictive religious climate of England for the new Israel of New England, the limited social mobility of the old world for the endless financial potential of the new world, and the well-defined sense of religious defiance for an undisturbed and placid religious landscape, the plot points which factored in their conversions changed.⁹ Often the voyage across the Atlantic itself was a significant plot point for American Puritans – an automatic, upfront change of context from those left behind on English shores.¹⁰ In her study Caldwell not only examines the ways new geographical space and social realities changed the plot, though not the shape, of American conversion narratives, but she also demonstrates that these narratives make up the earliest distinct American literary genre. The Puritan pattern of communicating an individual, spiritual experience became an embedded, yet adaptable, American literary form.

B. The Pedagogical Purpose of Early Autobiography

⁸ Thomas Shepard, “The Parable of the Ten Virgins Unfolded,” in *The Works of Thomas Shepard, First Pastor of The First Church, Cambridge, Mass. With a Memoir of His Life and Character, Vol. II*, edited by John A. Albro (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853), 631, Archive.org, accessed 11 May 2016.

⁹ Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative*, 7, 26-35, 119-134.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-134, 165.

Early Puritan and evangelical autobiographical writing was pedagogical at heart, and usually focused on the express purpose of recounting God's providences for posterity. Generally written by family patriarchs, such autobiographies included the conversion narrative of the author in order to establish his spiritual authority. Once established, the narrative continued on a plot of recounting the Lord's providential blessings and encouraging younger generations to similarly seek the Lord. Yet, as the purpose of conversion narratives expanded beyond church membership to include pedagogical direction, the pattern remained remarkably consistent. As Hindmarsh claims, "...all evangelical autobiographies, whatever their differences and variations at other levels" demonstrate the same narrative pattern.¹¹

Established by its first context of church membership, the public spoken nature of the conversion narrative easily adapted to autobiographical writing. Because individuals learned to recount God's work in their lives in a manner for others to hear, evaluate, and participate in, stories of conversion could also be implemented within public or semi-public written accounts. "As the member of a family, a church, and a body politic, he could never speak simply to hear his own echo, nor was he free to consider his autobiographical reflection of himself totally apart from the faces that surrounded it," Daniel B. Shea, Jr., explains concerning the early American autobiographical writer.¹² Toward the ends of their lives, family patriarchs often recounted their spiritual experiences in written form in order to reassure themselves and their descendants of their eternal state, and conversion narratives served to establish their authority to leave behind

¹¹ Hindmarsh, "Patterns of Conversion," 75.

¹² Daniel B. Shea, Jr., *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 111.

a textual reminder of God's faithfulness and promises for posterity.¹³ Conversion established the foundation from which the plot of one's life arose and was therefore necessary for recounting a lifetime's worth of evidences of grace.¹⁴ Usually based on journals kept over the course of a lifetime, early American religious autobiographies involved careful revision and refinement in order to ensure that lives and personal experiences were presented to posterity as spiritual arguments, and often the lines of literary authorship were blurred as sons finished and edited their fathers' autobiographical works posthumously.¹⁵

For the writer of early American spiritual autobiography, inclusion of his personal conversion narrative was not for the purpose of gaining access to a community, but rather to establish his pedagogical authority. Nonetheless, by focusing on the writer's immediate family and future posterity it did retain a communal purpose; and if published posthumously, the autobiography gained an even wider, and more public, readership. One of the clearest examples can be found in the multi-generational autobiographical writings of the Mathers, written for their sons, but published to benefit the new religious life of the broader New England community.¹⁶ As the most prolific Puritan autobiographers, Richard, Increase, and Cotton all in turn wrote their own autobiographical work, but also

¹³ Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 92-93, 102, 111.

¹⁴ Ibid., 100-101, 107-110, 123-124, 140-141, 155, 177-178, 197-198, 213-214, 228. Shea's study looks at the conversion narratives of nine different Puritan and evangelical autobiographies: Edward Taylor, John Winthrop, Roger Clap, Thomas Shepard, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and Samuel Hopkins.

¹⁵ Ibid., 152-181. Perhaps the most pronounced example of this can be found among the writings of the Mathers.

¹⁶ Increase Mather, *The Life and Death of that Reverend Man of God, Mr. Richard Mather, Teacher of the Church in Dorchester in New England* (Cambridge, MA: Samuel Green and Marmaduke Johnson, 1670), Name.umd.umich.edu/N00097.0001.001, accessed 27 February, 2017; Cotton Mather, *Parentator. Memoirs of Remarkables in the Life and Death of the Ever-Memorable Dr. Increase Mather. Who Expired, August 23. 1723* (Boston: B. Green, 1724), Name.umd.umich.edu/N02149.0001.001, accessed 27 February 2017; Samuel Mather, *The Life of the Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather, D.D. & F.R.S. Late Pastor of the North Church of Boston. Who Died, Dec. 13. 1727*, 8 (Boston: Samuel Gerrish, 1729), Archive.org, accessed 27 February 2017.

wrote to complete the writing of their fathers, blurring the lines between autobiography and biography. For certain, though, all wrote to the audience of their posterity – each work is clearly directed towards the next generation.¹⁷ Demonstrating both the pedagogical aspects of the Mathers' writings and the blurred lines of authorship between sons and fathers, Increase introduces his work on the life of his father, Richard, saying:

But it must needs be in it self a thing pleasing to God, that his grace towards and in his Servants, and the wonders of his Providence about them, should be kept in remembrance. Therefore some have written their own Lives... And the like did this Reverend Man who is to be the Subject of the ensuing Discourse essay to do; and proceeded therein to the 39th year of his Age, but finished not what he had purposed. It remaineth therefore that some other should do it, which we shall in the following words of truth and plainness endeavor to do.¹⁸

To establish the argument of each work, the Mathers included the important narratives of conversion, whether they were short or lengthy. Increase Mather's account did not waste words; the account of his conversion is constrained to a paragraph after crediting his parents with a pious upbringing.¹⁹ Cotton Mather's personal account, however, was much lengthier, spanning the first fifty pages.²⁰ Yet the argument, or plot, of each Mather autobiography depended on the initial spiritual authority established by narrating an authentic conversion.

Thomas Shepard is another noteworthy example. He not only recorded his congregants' testimonies, but he also wrote his own autobiography titled "My Birth & Life." Dedicated to his son for pedagogical purposes, Shepard's account was not

¹⁷ Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 152-153

¹⁸ Increase Mather, "The Life and Death of that Reverend Man of God, Mr. Richard Mather, Teacher of the Church in Dorchester in New-England," in *Journal of Richard Mather. 1635. His Life and Death. 1670., Collections of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, No. 3.* (Boston: D. Clapp, 1874), 40-41, Archive.org, accessed 11 May 2016.

¹⁹ Increase Mather and M. G. Hall, ed., "The Autobiography of Increase Mather," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 71, Part 2 (October 1961), 279-280, Americanantiquarian.org, accessed 11 May 2016. See also Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 155.

²⁰ Mather, *Parentator*. Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 154.

published until almost two centuries later in the 19th century, highlighting its semi-public nature.²¹ One of the earliest American autobiographers, Shepard's work is comprehensive, including an account of his childhood, his education and entrance into ministry, his relocation to New England, and a history of the colony; but, it is his account of his conversion that established why the following narrative of his life was important for later generations.²²

Shepard's conversion narrative is a wonderful example of Hindmarsh's U-shape narrative mentioned above. Typical of the Puritan narrative, Shepard's path towards conversion starts with a lack of awareness of his spiritual need and descends through increasingly intense and dark spiritual encounters in order to arrive at the bottom point of complete spiritual awareness of sin (the turning point of the U-shape). He starts by recounting a period in which he had "many good affections," often stirred by good preaching, but in which time his affections waffled as he often chose to partake in "loose & lewd" company.²³ Eventually, Shepard's wayward lifestyle descends into a night of total drunkenness after which he awakes to find himself on the Sabbath day; in misery, Shepard hides himself in a cornfield where the Lord "did meet me with much sadness of hart & troubled my soule for this & other my sins which then I had cause & leisure to thinke of..."²⁴ As this awakening of Shepard's heart intensifies in the following months, he descends further along the path of conversion into an awareness of his sin, his

²¹ Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 139.

²² Ibid., 139, 144, 147.

²³ Thomas Shepard and Nehemiah Adams, ed., *The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard, the Celebrated Minister of Cambridge, N.E., with Additional Notices of His Life and Character, by Nehemiah Adams, Pastor of the First Church in Connexion with the Shepard Society, Cambridge* (Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1832), 20-21, Archive.org, accessed 11 May 2016.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

hardness of heart, and the righteous holiness of God.²⁵ At the pivotal moment of Shepard's narrative, he is finally and completely impressed with the "terrors of the Lord," which begin "to break in like floods of fire onto my soule."²⁶ The length of time this spiritual bottoming-out lasted could vary greatly among narrators; for Shepard it lasted "three quarters of a year," during which time he contemplated suicide.²⁷ The moment of conversion finally arrives when:

...I knew not what to do... it came to my mind that I should do what X [Christ] did; when he was in agony, he prayed earnestly; & so I fell down to prayer, & being in prayer, I saw myselfe so unholy & God so holy that my spirits began to sinke; yet the Lord recovered me & poured out a spirit of prayer upon me for free mercy & pittie, & in the conclusion of the prayer, I found the Lord helping me to see my unworthiness of any mercy, & that I was worthy to be cast out of his sight, & and so leave myselfe with him to do with me what he would...²⁸

As conversion begins to lift him out of his spiritual depths, Shepard recounts that the "terroure of the Lord began to assuage sweetly..."²⁹ As he ascends the upward slope of his experience, Shepard meditates on the promises of scripture, forsakes loose company, and seeks to awaken the hearts of his friends.³⁰ The upward swing of the U-shape narrative establishes the new convert solidly in his faith as his heart and life are transformed. Shepard writes, "I found therefore the Lord revealing free mercy, & that all my helpe was in that, to give Xt., & so to enable me to beleieve in Xt., & accept of him, & here I did rest."³¹

Without first establishing their conversions as foundational for their religious and social authority, neither the Mathers nor Shepard would have had the spiritual basis for

²⁵ Shepard and Adams, *The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard*, 22-25.

²⁶ Ibid., 25.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 25-26.

²⁹ Ibid., 26.

³⁰ Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 26-27.

³¹ Ibid., 27.

the arguments they hope to make with their lives. By establishing their conversions, these men could launch into the plots of their autobiographical writing. After establishing the author's conversion, early American autobiography mostly recounted a double plot; first, it looked for the evidences of God's grace, and second, it displayed the signs of God's favorable providence. Patriarchs communicated changed lives morally, but the changes most commonly experienced focused on inward realities – the consequences of conversion were assurance, peace, and knowledge of God's providence.³² Meanwhile, the outward realities of conversion tended to focus on God's providential blessings. Shea writes, "The spiritual autobiographer is primarily concerned with the question of grace: whether or not the individual has been accepted into divine life, and acceptance signified by psychological and moral changes which the autobiographer comes to discern in his past experience."³³ And:

As historian of himself, the Puritan autobiographer was engaged in essentially the same task, acknowledging divine blessings and providential intersections and weighing the positive benefits of the most dismal calamities. Just as the historian tended less to describe events than the divine ordering of them, the autobiographer often made Providence the chief character of his narrative, his own life merely the setting for its actions.³⁴

In order to teach younger generations about the Lord, Puritan autobiographical plots were meant to demonstrate the state of a patriarch's heart and examine that which God had done for him. Rather than exemplifying what the author had done as a moral agent himself, he sought evidences of what God had done in his life, narratively searching his individual experiences and the events of his life in order to demonstrate providential

³² Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 101, 106-110.

³³ *Ibid.*, xi.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

spiritual realities.³⁵ In its earliest American context, the conversion narrative in written form could remind readers, either family or the general public, that the life of a patriarch was an argument for the grace and providence of God.

C. *Evangelical Exemplars from Posthumous Editors*

Eighteenth century examples of spiritual autobiography demonstrate two growing emphases within the genre – memoir as public argument and an intensification of the self within writing. In the hands of Jonathan Edwards, the conversion narrative as literary motif maintained many similarities to those of the earlier Puritans; however, it also became a defense, or justification, against the attacks of the Awakening's detractors. As the American religious landscape changed and earlier Puritan hegemony concerning conversion unraveled, the context and the plot of the conversion narrative changed, though its basic shape did not. On the other hand, the autobiographical writing of Sarah Osborn demonstrates something quite different from Edwards's use of the conversion narrative. Osborn's autobiographical writings served as intensely personal, though public, demonstrations of the evidence of God's work in her life. Using her writing as a personal reminder of God's faithfulness when in distress, Osborn wrote prolifically on the topic of her life. Though there are significant differences between Edwards's and Osborn's writing, both utilized the conversion narrative as evidence and justification.

When Edwards put his pen to paper in an effort to explain the awakening taking place in Northampton, he did not write *A Faithful Narrative* as a personal account to his immediate congregation or posterity; rather, he wrote to a broader national and

³⁵ Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 126.

international audience to give a public account of spiritual experiences taking place.³⁶

Edwards describes the different experiences of Abigail Hutchinson and Phebe Bartlet along similar lines as earlier narratives – both are first unaware of their sin and then awakened to their need as seeking God makes them aware of their hopelessness and personal need of grace. After they are converted, they both undergo numerous experiences that develop their holiness – particularly, they grow in awareness of God’s holiness; develop their love for God above all else; and desire to convert their friends and family.³⁷ In a departure from earlier examples, these conversion narratives serve Edwards’s larger argument concerning the activities of the revival, rather than serving as narratives crafted for entrance into a community or for establishing the spiritual authority of the one who has undergone conversion.³⁸

This change is perhaps even better demonstrated in Edwards’s most popular work, *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*, which Edwards produced by heavily editing the diary and correspondence Brainerd bequeathed to him.³⁹ Edwards considered Brainerd’s diary so important as a defense of the Awakening that he delayed his own writing projects combatting Arminianism in order to ensure its publication.⁴⁰ Though *Life of Brainerd* followed in the literary tradition of earlier spiritual exemplars, Edwards recognized that editing and publishing the work was not solely for the purpose of sharing the life of the man it memorialized; rather, it could serve as a

³⁶ C.C. Goen, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 4: The Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 32-46.

³⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 4: The Great Awakening*, edited by C.C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 191-205.

³⁸ Goen, 27-32.

³⁹ Joseph A. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, & American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 63.

⁴⁰ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 329-330.

theological argument for Edwards's views concerning the religious life, in the form of an individual's life experiences.⁴¹ Brainerd was a living example of Edwards's convictions, and producing a textual version of that living argument could prove to be a powerful tool for justifying the Awakening.

The conversion narrative contained within *Life of Brainerd* encapsulates the standard U-shape, but it also demonstrates the changing autobiographical context. Brainerd's account of his descent into hopeless spiritual awareness and of his climb upward after a hopeful conversion covers the first fifteen pages of the first edition.⁴² Similar to earlier spiritual autobiography, the account of Brainerd's conversion serves as the foundation for the ensuing plot and establishes his spiritual voice; however, whereas earlier Puritan accounts focused on God's providence and the resulting peaceful assurance, the focus of Brainerd's account shifts to the benevolent heart conversion was expected to produce. Brainerd's spiritual life is not marked by the same degree of inward peace and assurance that earlier autobiographical writers sought to demonstrate; even though Edwards heavily edited some of Brainerd's more extreme periods of spiritual and psychological darkness, the final work maintained much of Brainerd's sense of inner-turmoil, or what Norman Pettit has called, "his joyless determination to perseverance."⁴³ Furthermore, though echoes of the earlier Puritan focus on providence remain, by and large, the results of conversion in Brainerd's life are less marked by God's abundant

⁴¹ Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards*, 64.

⁴² Jonathan Edwards, *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd, Minister of the Gospel, Missionary to the Indians, from the Honourable Society in Scotland, for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and Pastor of a Church of Christian Indians in New-Jersey. Who Died at Northampton in New-England, Octob. 9th 1747. In the 30th Year of His Age: Chiefly Taken from His Own Diary, and Other Private Writings, Written for His Own Use; and Now Published, by Jonathan Edwards, A.M. Minister of the Gospel at Northampton* (Boston: D. Henchman, 1749), 1-15, Archive.org, accessed 4 May 2016.

⁴³ Norman Pettit, "Editor's Introduction," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 7: The Life of David Brainerd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 1, 19-24.

blessings to Brainerd, and more by Brainerd's productive work for the good of others as evidenced in his concern for the unconverted.⁴⁴ In *Life of Brainerd*, we see a continued dependence on the conversion narrative to establish spiritual voice and authority, but the ensuing plot of the work, which focuses on Brainerd's struggle to continue in service for the good of others while wrestling with his own internal darkness, is a decidedly different plot from earlier Puritan autobiographies.

At the end of the 18th century, Samuel Hopkins, a devotee of Jonathan Edwards, worked to share the life and writings of Sarah Osborn with the American religious public. Though she was a significantly less notable person for her contemporaries, in many ways Hopkins viewed Osborn with similar awe as his mentor, Edwards, had viewed Brainerd.⁴⁵ Osborn was unusual in her lifetime – poor, chronically ill, widowed twice, and only moderately educated, she nonetheless was one of the first American women to write extensively, producing an estimated fifteen thousand pages during her lifetime.⁴⁶ Her writing consisted of memoirs, journals, letters, and poems; and in keeping with the social expectations of her time, none of these were produced specifically for publication, though it is clear she shared her writing within her community, perhaps even lending her journals to others for spiritual encouragement, and hoped future generations would read her

⁴⁴ Edwards, *Life of Brainerd*, 46, 68. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards*, 64. Providence features significantly throughout the memoir and both Brainerd and Edwards's commentary speak of the "dispensations of providence."

⁴⁵ Catherine A. Brekus, "Sarah Osborn's Enlightenment: Reimagining Eighteenth-Century Intellectual History," in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, edited by Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 118.

⁴⁶ Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 1, 4.

words.⁴⁷ Rather, Osborn wrote for her own spiritual benefit, believing that by carefully examining the evidence of her life she could discover the evidence of God's work.⁴⁸

Because Hopkins heavily edited and rearranged Osborn's writings in ways similar to Edwards's editing of Brainerd's writing, the final shape of her published narrative did not lie solely in Osborn's hands.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the text Hopkins produced demonstrates the same pattern of conversion that Edwards emphasized with Brainerd. Osborn endured long years of yearning for divine grace while struggling against her own moral self-righteousness and rebellion. Beginning in her childhood and spanning the years of her young adulthood, Osborn was nearly converted many times, but always without final fruition.⁵⁰ Eventually, despair over the hardness of her heart brought her to a point of complete hopelessness.⁵¹ Echoing the narrative of Thomas Shepard, Osborn believed she was destined for hell and damnation when in a moment of final dejection, a voice countered these ideas and asked her why she doubted grace was still available.⁵² Recognizing that her loss of hope was the temptation of the devil, Osborn finally discovered an ability to surrender fully to the Lord.⁵³ Afterwards, Osborn experienced the Bible in a new spirit and was moved to tears while observing the sacrament. Finally able to repent of her sins, she was mentored by her pastor, joined the church, and experienced deep joy.⁵⁴ As with the many other examples of conversion narratives, Osborn reached

⁴⁷ Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World*, xii, 17, 335.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 9, 17-20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵⁰ Samuel Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn, who died at Newport, Rhode Island, on the Second Day of August, 1796. In the Eighty-Third Year of Her Age* (Catskill: N. Elliot, 1814), 7-21, Archive.org, accessed 5 May 2016.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21-24.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-33.

the spiritual bottom in order to experience conversion; only then could an upward ascent ensue.

After her conversion, the plot of Osborn's memoir becomes one of overcoming trial and temptation, and of doing good to others. Similar to earlier Puritan works, Osborn searches for the evidences of God's work in her life; however, her writing is also significantly more individually focused. She is her own primary audience, needing to remind herself of God's actions, rather than writing primarily to remind posterity of God's doings. According to Catherine A. Brekus, Osborn's writing was an intensely individual spiritual exercise. "Because she hoped to make a 'hidden God' visible, she picked up her pen day after day, hoping to see his refracted image on the page," she writes.⁵⁵ As prior editors of spiritual autobiography had done, Hopkins keeps Osborn's conversion narrative in a position of primary textual importance, establishing her spiritual voice and authority from it and laying the foundation for the ensuing plot.

D. Antebellum Publishing and the Importance of Memoir

Though America underwent significant cultural, political, and religious change at the end of the 18th century and into the antebellum period, the conversion narrative maintained its general pattern and shape. Tremendously important for the continuation of this tradition were Edwards's students Joseph Bellamy Samuel Hopkins, who constituted New Divinity theology through a reimagining of Edwards's Puritan thought and spirituality for the changing American context. While Hopkins rearticulated Edwards's intellectual legacy for a new generation through his own interpretation of "disinterested benevolence," Joseph Bellamy was vital for the pedagogical continuation of the

⁵⁵ Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World*, 4.

theological tradition.⁵⁶ As a popular teacher of clerical and seminary students during the last half of the 18th century, Bellamy personally trained over sixty ministers during his lifetime, leading Joseph A. Conforti to note, “Through his students, Bellamy provided a direct and personal connection to the era of the colonial awakening.”⁵⁷ As New Divinity theology spread across New England and inspired a new generation, Edwards’s theological legacy gained more influence in the opening decades of the 19th century than it likely had in even his own lifetime.⁵⁸ As such the individual recounting of conversion experiences remained the hallmark of awakening, and an important literary genre. The publication of individuals’ conversion experiences, and thus the narrative patterns of conversion, remained an important part of the American literary tradition during the rise of a new evangelical identity in post-revolutionary America.

Following the literary traditions of earlier generations, conversion narratives remained prominent in evangelical publishing, a rapidly growing industry. In the opening decades of the 19th century, the spiritual memoir, or biography, became one of the literary backbones of evangelical publishing. As Candy Gunther Brown notes, memoirs were indicative of evangelicals’ belief in the priesthood of all believers, giving a spiritual voice to particularly humble subjects such as women, children, and African Americans despite their lack ordination and status.⁵⁹ Such stories were venerated for their ability to help guide Christians through the trials of the world, and editors admonished their readers to

⁵⁶ Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards*, 62-86. New Divinity theology was firmly rooted in the Calvinist theology of Jonathan Edwards; however, Hopkins placed greater stress on the individual’s will and moral agency. Hopkins argued that as a sign of conversion the sinner must be willing to fully surrender and accept any divine judgment, even eternal damnation, for the glory of God and benefit of others. Whereas Edwards stressed renewed affections in the convert’s life, Hopkins emphasized holy action.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15, 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁹ Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 89.

view such exemplars as guides to holiness, often taking great liberty with their material to ensure it depicted correct piety.⁶⁰ Brown writes:

Since evangelicals viewed memoir subjects as models for emulation, editors felt justified in modifying narratives in order to present more worthy models to the public gaze... Editors concerned themselves first of all with selecting appropriate subjects. Because biographies conveyed a permanent impress on Christian character, the entire Christian community suffered a 'real misfortune when misdirected genius sets the seal of indestructibleness upon inferior objects.' Even the holiest lives included 'many blots' and 'many blanks in the most important passages' of the Christian story; editors sought to minimize the negative effects of these imperfections.⁶¹

As a result, memoirs of exemplary women were always mediated through the voice of a male author.⁶² Even when large portions of a woman's writing were published, they were done so under the editing hand and public authorship of an ordained man to maintain and ensure the subject's humble piety, feminine submission, and doctrinal orthodoxy.

Along with scores of new works, many earlier 17th and 18th century Puritan autobiographies were either published for the first time or brought back into print, most prominently the writings of Jonathan Edwards.⁶³ Many of Edwards's works were revisited with intense renewed interest, particularly the *Life of Brainerd*.⁶⁴ Considered a premier example of spiritual memoir, *Life of Brainerd* went through over thirty editions in the nineteenth century, reasserting itself in the American evangelical canon.⁶⁵ In fact, evangelical writing intentionally sought to align itself with earlier works considered part of the evangelical canon. Brown writes, "New publications gained entrance to the canon if they shared certain marks of membership, in other words, if they reinforced the same

⁶⁰ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 89, 91.

⁶¹ Ibid., 93-94.

⁶² Ibid., 94-95.

⁶³ Ibid., 89, 94.

⁶⁴ The best work on this topic is Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, & American Culture*, which examines not only the renewed interest in Edwards in the world of publishing, but also in education, history, missions, and "Americana."

⁶⁵ Brown, 94.

values as texts previously recognized as canonical.”⁶⁶ Because the purpose of evangelical writing was inherently pedagogical, texts belonged to the community, rather than the individual author, and editors took great freedom in revising manuscripts to fit “widely shared story structures” that reflected earlier established narrative forms.⁶⁷ Again from Brown:

Such universalizing frameworks exalted individual experience, in an age of emergent self-identity, as significant within the scheme of God’s redemptive purposes for the world. Narrative conventions allowed readers to envision their lives as typical, conforming to the same patterns that had guided generations of Christians. Deeply embedded atemporal structures provided a model for interpreting linear series of events as they occurred in one person’s life. The world of meanings unfolded and elaborated by the evangelical canon oriented readers to their everyday lives as evangelicals used texts to translate the world of lived experience into transcendent biblical categories of meaning.⁶⁸

Within the evangelical textual community the shape of the conversion narrative remained much the same, even as the plot shifted according to new social contexts. As Barbara Epstein and Susan Juster have noted, one significant change during this time was the variance found between men’s and women’s narratives.⁶⁹ Yet among both, anger toward divine authority featured prominently, a shift in plot from the Puritan’s hopeful recounting of God’s providence.⁷⁰ Antebellum conversion narratives demonstrate that both men and women during this period struggled to accept the sovereignty and authority of God over and above their own free will. Juster examines more than two hundred

⁶⁶ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁹ Both Epstein and Juster study the language men and women used of conversion during the early nineteenth century, and while they agree on many of the linguistic patterns, their conclusions vary. Most significantly, Epstein sees these linguistic variances as evidence of gender conflict, whereas Juster does not. I find Juster’s analysis more convincing. See Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); and Susan Juster, “‘In a Different Voice’: Male and Female Narratives of Religious Conversion in Post-Revolutionary America,” *American Quarterly* 41, No. 1 (March, 1989): 34-62.

⁷⁰ Juster, “‘In a Different Voice,’” 39.

conversion narratives published in evangelical periodicals and finds that these narratives demonstrate signs of the new post-revolutionary context. Men often speak of military experiences and of their skepticism of an authoritarian God, using language toward God reflective of their social resistance to submission.⁷¹ Juster writes, “After the initial resistance to God’s government was broken down, male sinners almost uniformly attempted to effect their own salvation by reforming their external behavior – by becoming moral.”⁷² Eventually, however, men’s narratives recount their conviction of the futility of this endeavor and their spiritual awakening confronts their desire for self-sufficiency.⁷³ Women more quickly recognized the futility of establishing grace through morality; among the female narratives Juster surveyed, the primary struggle was over God’s “showing partiality by bestowing grace on some of his children while abandoning others to damnation.”⁷⁴ Women anguished over whether God would show them mercy, too, or would pass them over to bestow it upon others.⁷⁵ Often, resolution was found when women realized that rejection of God’s doctrines was no less than rejection of God himself.⁷⁶

In addition to plots which expressed men’s and women’s various dealing with God’s sovereignty, antebellum evangelical writing and publishing became increasingly focused on helping readers both live as pilgrims and participate in the work of transforming the world.⁷⁷ Antebellum evangelicals struggled to reconcile the tension between their desire for a transformative presence and the call for purity, a struggle often

⁷¹ Juster, “‘In a Different Voice,’” 45-46.

⁷² Ibid., 47.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁷ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 1-2.

identified with the conflicting impulses toward Christian unity and denominationalism.⁷⁸

As the American religious landscape changed along with the political and commercial climate of the antebellum period, evangelical publishing provided a sense of community within a literary space unhindered by space or time and worked to provide readers with a shared religious identity while maintaining their doctrinal distinctives.⁷⁹ As such, conversion narratives and religious memoirs provided a common ground on which evangelicals could meet and find inspiration for the pilgrimage ahead.⁸⁰

This chapter establishes an understanding of the “widely shared story structures” after which the memoirs of missionary wives would have been patterned. A centuries old literary pattern, the conversion narrative as created by the Puritans remained a dominant story structure in the antebellum years. In fact, not only had the conversion narrative been maintained, but it experienced new and heightened significance as the world of evangelical writing expanded in scope and purpose through the rise of mass publishing. Though the conversion narrative was initially used to establish an individual’s entrance to a specific, localized religious community, it now worked to bring a religious reality to the world through which evangelicals imagined themselves pilgriming. In previous generations, the conversion narrative established the spiritual voice of an autobiographical writer so that he might pass on an account of God’s providential blessings to younger generations; by the nineteenth century, the conversion narrative took on an additional purpose – to defend or justify a particular theological perspective. Exemplary Christian lives became forceful arguments, and the conversion narrative served to establish the plots through which such arguments would be made. Individual

⁷⁸ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 33-41.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 6-15.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 88-95.

accounts of spiritual experience were given a national, even international, level of importance – they were to encourage the global evangelical body in its work to redeem the world and pilgrimage towards heaven.

Chapter Two: Changing Social Contexts for Early 19th Century Women

Having examined the literary tradition in which the missionary wife memoir participated, this chapter will now look at the new social context from which women wrote and engaged texts. As women in antebellum New England experienced increased educational opportunities, they engaged an expanding literary culture. Whereas in the previous century, Sarah Osborn's literary life made her exceptional, women in early nineteenth century New England commonly engaged their changing realities textually through both reading and writing, and were praised by evangelical leaders for participating in such important spiritual practices. Seeking to improve upon their conversion, women sought spiritual growth by "reading the self" and writing what they found in diary keeping and extensive correspondence. These acts, and the new social context which enabled women to carry them out, constituted a recontextualization of the Christian message for the gendered world in which women lived.

The literary practices of antebellum evangelical women were vitally important for their search for evangelical "usefulness." As women engaged New Divinity teaching on disinterested benevolence, millennialism, and missions, the outcomes of conversion they recorded in their diaries and letters demonstrated new plots that focused on finding particular ways God called them to service of others. Yet even as women became more significant participants in the evangelical community, they did so according to the particularly feminine world in which they lived, translating New Divinity theology for the woman's sphere.

A. Women Reading and Writing within the "Evangelical Textual Community"

Scholars debate the importance of the Revolution and the new republic for shaping antebellum ideas concerning the woman's sphere and her potential for contributing to the public good; however, they agree that as the new American republic left behind traditional patriarchal structures in favor of capitalistic and commercial systems, ideals of virtue shifted. Whereas women had once been considered largely insignificant for public virtue – a concept strictly concerned with male political involvement – in the early 19th century women became important arbiters of a redefined understanding of morality. As Ruth Bloch writes:

Not that women were ever regarded as incapable of all kinds of virtue. Women were thought to be as rational as men in exercising the private, Christian virtues – temperance, prudence, faith, charity. It was specifically public virtue – active, self-sacrificial service to the state on behalf of the common good – that was an essentially male attribute. While there were a few exceptional early American women who won recognition for their heroic defense of the wider community, these were the kind of exceptions that proved the rule. Public virtue was indeed possible for exceptional women, but it was never an inherently feminine characteristic.¹

Yet, the antebellum period witnessed the rise of woman as particularly responsible for teaching and inspiring the “piety, benevolence, and self-discipline that compose virtue.”² As definitions of virtue became increasingly feminized, in part under the influence of Jonathan Edwards's theology of the affections and their importance for benevolence and the common good, women increased in importance for the creation and maintenance of morality through their ability to shape and influence husbands and children.³ Bloch writes, “Women, especially in their role as mothers, were endowed with newfound moral

¹ Ruth Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11 (Fall 1987): 42.

² *Ibid.*, 46.

³ *Ibid.*, 47-49.

authority. The public/private distinction was in this manner redrawn, turning the classical ideal of male civic virtue on its head.”⁴

As such, equipping of women for the public good led to increased attention given to women’s education. Both literacy and education dramatically increased during the antebellum period. In New England, though the ability to read the Bible had long been an important value for women in addition to men, it was during the antebellum period that the literacy gap between men and women was finally closed.⁵ With the rapid development of female educational institutions, more women in New England were attending academies and seminaries than men by 1830, and women now both read and wrote at the same levels and rates as their male counterparts.⁶ Parents were generally the first to teach their daughters to read, as well as recommend which books to read, but their reading habits and ideals were supported and sustained by the academies their daughters attended.⁷ Teachers gave books as academic prizes and started literary societies among students, leading scholar Mary Kelley to observe the ways shared reading between female teachers and students redefined the activity as acceptably feminine.⁸

Antebellum women intentionally patterned themselves off of what they read, associating the act of reading with moral improvement, rather than simple intellectual or

⁴ Ruth Bloch, “Gender and the Public/Private Dichotomy in American Revolutionary Thought,” in *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650–1800*, ed. Ruth Bloch (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 161.

⁵ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 15-16.

⁶ Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America,” *The Journal of American History* 83 (September 1996): 408.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 406.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 410.

social improvement.⁹ Books not only became a “compass” by which women set the course for their lives, but they were used along with writing practices for the creation of self-identities to such an extent that they were often viewed as important companions and encouragers.¹⁰ Kelley writes:

Perhaps most notably, they constituted books as sites for meditations on and experiments with individual subjectivities they were fashioning... These readers explored ideas and personae, sampling perspectives and measuring relevance for their lives. And then, still using books as a primary resource, they set about making and remaking subjectivities.¹¹

Because reading was foundational for personal spiritual and moral growth, good reading practices were necessary to maintain. The question was not simply one of what women should read, but also of how they should read. As David Paul Nord observes, “Durable, timeless books required a kind of durable, timeless reading...” As a result, publishers during the period were quick to instruct the evangelical community concerning their reading practices. Nord explains that publishers gave instructions that reading “...should never be random or indiscriminate but rather slow, attentive, thoughtful, and purposive.”¹²

As they engaged texts in a variety of ways, reading served as a unifying act for women in a textual community. On a local level, reading out loud was encouraged in order for families and neighbors to engage texts together, demonstrating communal participation in the evangelical identity.¹³ New England women were also highly active

⁹ Mary Kelley, “Crafting Subjectivities: Women, Reading, and Self-Imagining,” in *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 57, 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65-67.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹² David Paul Nord, “Religious Reading and Readers in Antebellum America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15, No. 2 (Summer, 1995): 254-255.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 269. Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 133.

in starting female reading societies. Intended to improve their minds and shape opinions, women joined reading circles with the utmost seriousness.¹⁴ As Kelley writes of the period between 1805 and the onset of the Civil War:

In nearly every town and village and in every city, women gathered to read and write together. They did the same in academies and seminaries, where literary societies were woven into the fabric of a student's education. Members of these discursive bodies mandated collaboration in virtually everything they did. Constitutions and bylaws required that all members participate in the selection of books and in the conversations held at meetings, and all who joined were also expected to help stock the organizations' libraries.¹⁵

The women in these societies were committed to learning that which was "useful" for their roles as arbiters of morality.¹⁶ In order to fulfill their duty to influence society for good, women understood they must first be equipped communally through reading.

Not only did reading engage women with the evangelical community immediately surrounding them, but it also enabled them to engage with evangelicals across distance and time. When women read common evangelical narratives in order to attain spiritual growth, they viewed themselves as actively engaging the original authors. Women often referred to their books as "companions" and frequently talked about time alone with their books as time in the presence of the authors they represented. In 1838 one young diarist described her time alone with her books as "sweet communion" with the "glorious minds" of the past.¹⁷ Marginalia and literary albums flourished during this period, increasing a reader's ability to actively engage and respond to the texts she read. The frequent sharing of reading notes and excerpts with friends and family members either in person or through letters further increased the sense of a shared textual community as it

¹⁴ Mary Kelley, "'A More Glorious Revolution': Women's Antebellum Reading Circles and the Pursuit of Public Influence," *New England Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (June 2003): 165.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 170, 174.

¹⁷ Kelley, "Crafting Subjectivities," 64-65.

provided companionship to women's conversations with literary exemplars of the past.¹⁸

Texts became the locus of evangelical unity, rallying the faithful according to denominational, missional, and benevolent interests and commitments – a new experience for American women.¹⁹

Not only was reading a unifying activity for women, but it was also an important pedagogical one. The seriousness with which women in the “evangelical textual community” approached the pedagogical aspect of reading is demonstrated in the first female authored advice book for ministers' wives.²⁰ Written by Catherine Adams and published in 1835, *Daily Duties Inculcated in a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Wife of a Clergyman* contains advice on a wide range of topics from the fruits of the Spirit to the “employment of time,” presented as letters from the more experienced Adams to a younger and inexperienced correspondent. Adams touches on reading repeatedly among the many important duties she addresses. She writes that at a minimum, minister's wives will have the “duty to read and reflect” in order to meet the expectations of their station.²¹ But reading also has a further purpose for the common good of the community, serving as an important deterrent against gossip and meddlesome talk. Urging her readers to engage their families in communal reading practices for this purpose, she writes:

It is a delightful spectacle to see a family circle all interested in the same useful volume; one reading, while the rest pursue some quiet employment, listening to the perusal of the book, enjoying observations from parents and elder brothers, calculated, by bringing in collateral subjects, to shed light on the theme which engrosses their attention. Family reading cannot be too highly recommended.²²

¹⁸ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 123.

¹⁹ Ibid., 33, 37-41, 51-60, 92.

²⁰ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 96.

²¹ Catherine L. Adams, *Daily Duties Inculcated in a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Wife of a Clergyman* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1835), 127, Archive.org, accessed 24 February 2016.

²² Ibid., 53.

Adams not only recommends reading as morally beneficial for stemming gossip, she also believes it to be vital for motherhood. In a lengthy discussion of child rearing, Adams remonstrates parents for failing to set a good example for their children. Parents, and specifically mothers in the context of Adams's correspondence, sow the seeds of future spiritual fruit in the hearts of children by their example. Listing out that which mothers are to exemplify, Adams writes, "How important that we read much, that we reflect much, that we pray much. Then putting in daily practice what we have learned of the methods of the wise and good, we have reason to believe, that God will bless our endeavors, and save us from the anguish of seeing religion dishonored, by the unholy lives of our beloved children."²³ Here Adams directly links the Christian disciplines of meditation and prayer with the antebellum evangelical understanding of reading. Participation in the textual community is of moral importance not only among peers but for pedagogical purposes, as well.

"Reading the self," or self-examination expressed through writing, was an evangelical practice with roots in Puritan spirituality; and as women in New England became better educated, writing became increasingly established as a correlate activity to reading.²⁴ Reading, self-reflection, and writing were all enmeshed with one another in order to facilitate spiritual growth, and women were brought more fully into this tradition as their educational opportunities increased.²⁵ Literacy, and in particular writing, did not

²³ Adams, *Daily Duties*, 98-99.

²⁴ Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly, "Introduction," in *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 8. Margo Culley, "What a Piece of Work is 'Woman'! An Introduction," in *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, ed. Margo Culley (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 10.

²⁵ Kathleen M. Swaim, "'Come and Hear': Women's Puritan Evidences," in *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, ed. Margo Culley (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 34-35. Janet Moore Lindman, "Beyond the Meetinghouse: Women and Protestant Spirituality in

give the individual a simple practical advantage; it was the primary means by which people's hearts engaged a textual spirituality.

Continuing earlier literary traditions, antebellum evangelicals continued to utilize the conversion narrative as an important pattern for a Christian's spiritual journey – and women demonstrated an increased internalization of the pattern in their writing.

Analyzing the correspondence of a mother and daughter with their respective son and brother, Kelley writes:

They would have been familiar with the typical pattern of awakening: 'conviction of sin, severe depression, joyful conversion, and subsequent assurance punctuated by periods of spiritual deadness,' ... And, like other New Englanders, they would have considered such stories – whether printed in books, tracts, magazines, or newspapers – as household staples.²⁶

As women engaged such narratives through reading, they sought to replicate in them their own lives, writing to create new spiritual identities. For women seeking to demonstrate their usefulness, participation in the wider textual community meant structuring the realities of their own lives around the common narratives they read.²⁷ As Candy Gunther Brown writes, "Texts acquired ritual significance as evangelicals used words, in the context of relationships with other members of their textual community, to order experiences and formulate connections between embedded patterns and the details of everyday life."²⁸

Yet, as with reading, evangelical women who wrote during the opening decades of the nineteenth century did not view their literary efforts as isolated, individualized

Early America," in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 144-145, 152-153.

²⁶ Mary Kelley, "'Pen and Ink Communion': Evangelical Reading and Writing in Antebellum America," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (December 2011): 563-564.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 557.

²⁸ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 11-12.

work; rather, they wrote in order to both engage and influence the broader evangelical community. As Brown writes:

... identification with an evangelical textual community mediated and structured seemingly private experiences to connect with a larger social experience in the process of forming. Individuals felt their textual practices to be spiritually transformative since the Holy Spirit presumably worked through evangelical relationships to influence each individual's and the entire community's sanctification.²⁹

As participation in this textual community was unlimited by geographic restraints, a woman's dependence on local forms of Christian community decreased.³⁰ Brown writes that "...growth in holiness occurred not only in church on Sunday under clerical supervision but also every day at home" – a change that elevated a woman's domestic world as significantly connected to the broader evangelical community.³¹ Through personal correspondence, diary keeping, transcription of passages from books, hymns, sermons, and periodicals, writing encouraged sanctification across spatial and geographic boundaries. Janet Moore Lindman notes how importantly women viewed these interactions in her study of one woman's journal kept from 1819 to 1827. Lindman recounts the vital role writing played for the perseverance of Lomax's faith, stating, "She believed writing was efficacious to spiritual community and that 'Christians, when separated, should write often, and exhort one another, as the mean apostles did of old.' This was God's way to 'keep alive the heavenly flame' in every Christian heart. Lomax infused letter writing with religious power; through the act of correspondence, Christians became united as one in Christ."³² As antebellum women considered their participation in

²⁹ Brown, *The Word in the World*, 10.

³⁰ Ibid., 10, 12-14.

³¹ Ibid., 134-135.

³² Lindman, "Beyond the Meetinghouse," 149.

the evangelical community, they wrote as a duty to uphold and encourage one another, seeking to influence the broader community with their usefulness.

For many antebellum evangelical women, a particularly significant reason for writing was the discernment of God's will. Discerning God's will in the life of an individual was a crucial and important aspect of developing self-identity; however, reading and writing the self was not considered or expected to be an autonomous act of self-creation. Instead, women sought to write in submission to God, understanding their literary explorations of self as humble discoveries of God's work in their lives. In a study of late eighteenth and early nineteenth American women's memoirs, Ann Taves writes, "These memoirs make clear that ascertaining God's will was a complex interpretive process in which humans, texts (the Bible and other devotional books), and diary keeping all played critical roles."³³ As women read, examined their lives, and wrote, they expected to learn about both God and themselves in order to shape their hearts and identities, bringing their individual wills into alignment with the will of God and conforming to antebellum social realities and evangelical expectations.³⁴

In seeking to learn and submit to God's will through their writing practices, evangelical women hoped to live dynamic lives within their particularly feminine spheres, not in opposition to them, as Lindman and Joanna Gillespie have aptly noted.³⁵ Evangelical women greatly desired to discover and create their self-identities according

³³ Ann Taves, "Self and God in the Early Published Memoirs of New England Women," in *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, ed. Margo Culley (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁵ Lindman, "Beyond the Meetinghouse," 144-145, 152-153. Joanna B. Gillespie, "'The Clear Leadings of Providence': Pious Memoirs and the Problems of Self-Realization for Women in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer, 1985): 204.

to the social contexts of the day.³⁶ For antebellum women influenced by New Divinity teaching, particularly Hopkinsonian ideas on benevolence, this meant living life in service of others, or as many put it, in being “useful.”³⁷ Gillespie explains, “Religious calling mandated the minding of others’ welfare as a condition of working out one’s own salvation.”³⁸ Living within a certain set of social realities did not seem to bother the vast majority of women who participated in the evangelical textual community; rather, they saw themselves as living in a time and period of significant opportunity. Gillespie writes, “The terms of self-fulfillment for them were to be found in living out their community’s highest ideals and moving toward the very center of that evangelical subculture, not in pulling away from it.”³⁹ Evangelical methods of reading and writing the self were viewed as enabling women to “bloom” within their proper station, a station which was not doubted or viewed as limiting.⁴⁰ Writing did enable women to increase their sense of selfhood and of usefulness, but not in rejection of their community’s teachings on the genders’ spheres. Again from Gillespie:

Through these women’s writings we can trace the evangelical impulse as it coursed through the American female psyche, and weigh its contribution to an increasing sense of selfhood in these otherwise conforming, middle-class women. We see women who created their own models of behavior inspired and directed by divine authority, whose written conversation with God assisted them in honoring their own inner stages and self-realization.⁴¹

³⁶ Gillespie, “‘The Clear Leadings of Providence,’” 198, 200.

³⁷ See note on the New Divinity on p. 25.

³⁸ Gillespie, 199.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

The antebellum evangelical community primarily understood women as called to care for others as arbiters of virtue within the community, and this was embedded into the literary and textual practices of evangelicalism's increasingly educated women.⁴²

B. Women Engaging Millennialism, Disinterested Benevolence, and Missions

Antebellum women engaged an evangelical textual community that was concerned with Christian unity, pedagogy, and mutual encouragement; however, its purpose and vision extended beyond these concerns, hoping to greatly influence the world. Intentionally positioning their textual presence in order to influence antebellum America, evangelicals viewed writing and publishing as powerful and effective methods by which to usher in awakening, conversion, and fruitfulness. Important for this disposition was a belief in the approaching millennium and a confidence in God's direction of evangelistic efforts. Coinciding with such millennialism was a commitment to benevolence, from which sprung numerous causes, including the American missionary endeavor. As New England women engaged each other and the broader community through acts of literary exploration and textual self-creation, they engaged these important antebellum evangelical commitments, letting them shape the identities they formed for themselves. As Mary Kelley writes, "...reading and writing, writing and reading, as the doubling suggests, function as mutually constitutive acts. For many antebellum Americans, these practices, which continually intersected and reinforced one another, were fundamental to articulating an identity with which to act upon the world."⁴³

⁴² Gillespie, "'The Clear Leadings of Providence,'" 217.

⁴³ Kelley, "'Pen and Ink Communion,'" 557.

The legacy of Jonathan Edwards in developing antebellum benevolent and missional ideas is uncontested.⁴⁴ Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, and Jonathan Edwards, Jr., were loyal to a modified version of Edwardsian theology, particularly in their commitment to Edwards's views on man's ability to obey God and in their stress on immediate repentance.⁴⁵ However, whereas the New Divinity agreed with Edwards's definitions, they placed greater emphasis on the action of the human will, or his natural ability.⁴⁶ Samuel Hopkins in particular took on the mantle of reinterpreting Edwards, and whereas both men conceived of virtue as a lack of self-interest resulting in a benevolent disposition towards "being in general," and both maintained that regeneration was necessary to cause this shift from self-interest to benevolence, Hopkins's emphasis on the resulting action of the will introduced a new emphasis to Edwards's legacy.⁴⁷ David W. Kling clarifies, "Whereas Edwards saw true virtue culminating in a holy consciousness, Hopkins viewed it as culminating in holy action."⁴⁸ Hopkins even went so far as to claim that the greatest expression of such disinterested benevolence would be the "willingness to be damned for the glory of God and good of the universe," should such be required of the individual.⁴⁹

This concept of disinterested benevolence was the central motivating idea behind numerous evangelical causes, including the missionary movement.⁵⁰ Antebellum evangelicals not only revisited Edwards's theology, but they also found a ready waiting

⁴⁴ David W. Kling, "The New Divinity and the Origins of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions," in *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004), 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 18. Joseph A. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition & American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 113.

⁴⁶ Conforti, 121.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 129-130.

⁴⁸ Kling, 24.

⁴⁹ Conforti, 112.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 64

exemplar in David Brainerd. Just as Brainerd had served as a living example of Edwards's original conception of benevolence toward "being in general," he likewise became the symbol of willing sacrifice for the "greater glory of God's kingdom and the betterment of humankind."⁵¹ Members of the first missionary band sent by the ABCFM would most likely have read *Life of Brainerd* while studying at Andover Theological Seminary, and countless missionaries' memoirs mention the work as a source for inspiration, marking its tremendous importance for the instigation of the American missionary cause.⁵²

In addition to Edwards's views on disinterested benevolence, antebellum evangelicals, particularly those involved with the missionary effort, were greatly influenced by his view on providential history and the dawn of the millennium.⁵³

According to Kling:

Because the world was gradually improving in anticipation of Christ's return, a guarded optimism attended this view. Christian activity was a precondition of the coming new age, for Christians who engaged in benevolent activities, social reform, and missionary outreach actually played a divinely ordained role in ushering in the kingdom of Christ. Edwards's millennialism thus joined revivalism and missions in a providential scheme.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards*, 75. Kling, "The New Divinity," 12.

⁵² Conforti, 71, 74-78. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson, The Dramatic Events of the First American Foreign Mission, and the Course of Evangelical Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 24-26. See also Stuart Piggin, "The Expanding Knowledge of God: Jonathan Edwards's Influence on Missionary Thinking and Promotion," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), and Andrew F. Walls, "Missions and Historical Memory: Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

⁵³ Kling, "The New Divinity," 19. See also R. Pierce Beaver, "Eschatology in American Missions," in *Basileia: Walter Freytag zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Evang. Missionverlag GMBH, 1959), and Richard Lee Rogers, "'A Bright and New Constellation': Millennial Narratives and the Origins of American Foreign Missions," in *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004).

⁵⁴ Kling, 19.

As his disciples repeated Edwards's theology of cosmic redemption, they held on to an optimistic millennialism. Though many Americans interpreted post-Revolutionary society as tumultuous and spiritually dark, the revivals which took place between 1790 and 1810 introduced a sense of spiritual change and millennial hope. Kling writes, "A sense of urgency, born of the conviction that they lived in an era of national and religious crisis, stirred the New Divinity men (and other evangelicals as well) to fill the social vacuum and shape the course of history according to what they believed was God's design."⁵⁵ Though many found the state of American society discouraging, the spiritual awakening taking place hinted at eschatological purpose, encouraging the burgeoning evangelical benevolent and missional movements to seek societal influence.⁵⁶

Along with their male counterparts, women actively engaged Edwards's theological legacy found in antebellum millennialism and disinterested benevolence. In their engagement of the evangelical textual community, women encountered the ideas and teaching of Edwards and the New Divinity.⁵⁷ As Genevieve McCoy writes, "If the prolific religious press of New England and New York is any indication of its readership's views, the truths of divine sovereignty, human depravity *and* moral accountability, and the reconciliation of necessity and freedom, despite their apparent contradictions, continued to agitate the orthodox faithful."⁵⁸ As women sat under New Divinity preachers and studied in female seminaries influenced by the works of Edwards,

⁵⁵ Kling, "The New Divinity," 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13, 15.

⁵⁷ Genevieve McCoy, "'Reason for Hope': Evangelical Women Making Sense of Late Edwardsian Calvinism," in *Jonathan Edwards's Writings: Text, Context and Interpretation*, ed. Stephen Stein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 175.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 177.

they were instilled with the movement's messages.⁵⁹ In fact, women were central to continuing and promoting the Calvinistic tradition in the opening decades of the 19th century.⁶⁰ As Joseph Conforti writes, "Edwardsian social ethics seem to have appealed to individuals, including many women, who were on the margins of or disturbed by the new commercial economic order."⁶¹

Perhaps most importantly, many women were taught that disinterested benevolence should not be relegated to their domestic spheres alone; rather, disinterested benevolence went beyond to the concerns of the broader community.⁶² The popular periodicals women read were committed to demonstrating that Christian conversion resulted in Edwardsian benevolence, highlighting the stories of those who became involved with various benevolent causes after experiencing spiritual rebirth.⁶³ For many, a language of "usefulness" was adopted to describe the outworking of benevolence in a Christian's life. As McCoy notes:

Following Edwards, these men taught that true religion became visible only in its fruits, or holy action. Accordingly the Christian obligation to be 'useful,' to actively participate in the reformation of one's self, family, community, and all human society, became the chief means of proving one's saintly character. Many women from evangelical Calvinist families, raised to be unself-interested and directed to the needs of others, readily responded to this association... In ever greater numbers orthodox young women attended female seminaries that eschewed the traditional "ornamental" education for "useful" types of knowledge that would prepare them to become schoolteachers, wives of ministers and missionaries, or just good Christian mothers.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Joseph A. Conforti, "Mary Lyon, the Founding of Mount Holyoke College, and the Cultural Revival of Jonathan Edwards," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter, 1993): 72-73.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 77-80.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁶³ McCoy, "'Reason for Hope,'" 181-182.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

In her examination of the antebellum Sunday school movement, Ann Boylan demonstrates the ways women implemented their search for usefulness as understood and defined according to the theology of disinterested benevolence. In particular she highlights the ways in which women saw their work as the direct outworking of their conversion within the woman's sphere. The benevolent work of evangelical women was not initiated in opposition to evangelical ideals of womanhood; rather, it was a theologically driven response to the changing American context that developed simultaneously to the new ideals of womanhood.⁶⁵ Boylan writes:

In their new lives, they were to have recognizably different patterns of activity, characterized by exemplary behavior as well as action to evangelize others... As the writings of Sunday school organizers reveal, a two-pronged process led women from the conversion experience to benevolent work. First, they rejected prevailing ideas about women and created new ideals rooted in evangelical Protestantism; and second, they found institutional means of enacting and promulgating their new ideals.⁶⁶

Along with the changing ideals of womanhood arising out of liberal political theory and the environment of the new republic, evangelical women in New England rejected the ideals of the well-bred lady in favor of idealized women who were educated for the common good and benefit of others. In the writings of female leaders of the Sunday school movement, Boylan finds evidence of a strong conviction that conversion required them to put away all signs of gentility. Women repented of being "gay" and "frivolous," participating in society which was not serious, and of dancing in particular. They substituted these things with a strong desire to find a means by which to be useful and to live lives of purpose for God's kingdom.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Anne M. Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Oct., 1978): 63.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

Crucial to this search for usefulness was the belief that though men and women were inherently different and complimentary to each other, the usefulness of women was no less important or valuable than that of men. The degree to which evangelical women believed this helps to explain the paradox of antebellum America's increasingly strict definitions of the woman's sphere and the empowerment women found in such definitions. Boylan writes, "Rather, men and women were complementary equals, with equally important roles to play in society. Evangelical women were to "be up and doing" and although their work differed from that of men – concerned as it was with care of children, the weak, and the oppressed – it was by no means less valuable."⁶⁸ As evangelical women sought and undertook work that demonstrated their conversion and ensuing usefulness, they promoted an ideal of womanhood that coincided with changes in broader American culture, yet was specific to their particular religious convictions.⁶⁹

Again from Boylan:

In evangelicalism, women found an alternative to uselessness. They also found ideals and values which not only reflected their own view of women's nature, but also encouraged their desire to create broader educational and social opportunities for women. Hence when evangelical women developed seminaries, benevolent societies, and church groups, they were creating alternative institutions through which the evangelical ideal of woman could be developed, taught, and promulgated.⁷⁰

New England women in the opening decades of the 19th century engaged the Christian message according to a new social and religious context. New emphasis on female virtue placed greater emphasis on women's education and women found themselves engaging in textual communities at remarkable new rates. Within evangelicalism, reading and writing became foundational disciplines for spiritual growth,

⁶⁸ Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood," 65-66.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 75-76.

enabling and encouraging women to contextualize New Divinity theology for their own gendered realities. As a result of these social and religious changes, women experienced a new opportunity to translate the Christian message themselves for the context within which they lived.

Chapter Three: The Memoir of Harriet Newell – Shifting the Plot to “Usefulness”

During the first half of the nineteenth century, women in New England were inspired to enter into the work of missions with their male counterparts. Guided by their belief in the approaching millennial age and expressing the desire to be “useful,” evangelical women wholeheartedly embraced the call to take the Christian gospel to the “heathen” world.¹ Writing about their experiences, these women understood that their words were not simply for their own private growth, but also for the benefit of others. As American missionary wives became lived examples of disinterested benevolence, their memoirs become powerful tools for demonstrating feminine evangelicalism. The genre of the missionary wife memoir was an important way for antebellum women to make the gospel their own and live out usefulness according to their gendered contexts.

As participants in the evangelical textual community, the first missionary wives would have been educated to understand New Divinity teachings on benevolence and the approaching millennium; by engaging these teachings through reading and writing the self, the first missionary would exemplify the usefulness which the evangelical community believed should ensue from conversion. As the stories of their lives of usefulness were published, the role of the conversion narrative within their memoirs laid the foundation for demonstrating what female usefulness could look like. Without the evangelical textual community and without women’s intentional construction of self-identities from reading, the new plot of conversion to usefulness found in the memoirs of

¹ I choose to use the term “heathen” on occasion to indicate the nineteenth-century mindset and terminology of the first American missionaries.

missionary wives could not have had the same powerful impact for the inclusion of women in the missionary effort.

As the prototype of this genre and literary movement, the memoir of Harriet Newell has been under appreciated. Rivaling Jonathan Edwards's biography of David Brainerd in its day, Harriet's memoir was cited by contemporaries as helping to catapult women into the missionary cause, if not ignite the cause altogether. Though today we are quick to associate the early missions movement with its more prominent male figures, Harriet loomed large in the imaginations of the movement's earliest devotees, male and female. With her premature death and the subsequent publishing of her memoir shortly thereafter, parents committed to the missionary cause soon began giving their daughters the given name "Harriet Newell" and both male and female missionaries a generation later cited Harriet as their primary source of inspiration.

What precisely made Harriet Newell such a motivating figure for the early American missionary cause? For certain, the newly established and growing evangelical textual community was an important factor. Without the publication of her memoir, Harriet's short service with the ABCFM would most likely have been remembered only as a byword. Yet the growing demand for pious reading material and the literary practices which accompanied the demand – communal religious reading, evangelical literary correspondence, spiritual journaling – primed American evangelicals to receive the memoir as a new addition to the tradition of great evangelical lives. Due to early 19th century evangelicalism's renewed interest in Edwards's accounts of earlier revivals, memoir of David Brainerd, and theology of the millennium, a contemporary literary work that continued such evangelical tradition was positioned to be well received.

Yet the literary environment was hardly the only cause. As this chapter hopes to demonstrate, the narrative within the memoir itself was a compelling and novel argument for its contemporary readers. As stated by many of its readers, the gender of the memoir's subject was profoundly important to the motivation it inspired. As the shape and pattern of the narrative reflected earlier male narratives, the use and application of such familiar language by a woman offered the reader with something striking. If even a woman could desire usefulness and sacrifice her life in pursuit of it, what might the gospel require of men? By encountering a narrative of spiritual conversion leading to usefulness in the voice of a woman, the American evangelical community was challenged to reconsider its own commitments.

In fact, the idea of usefulness is key to understanding Harriet Newell's memoir and the context in which it was created. In this narrative, usefulness is precisely that to which Harriet is ultimately converted. Unlike earlier generations which emphasized personal spiritual assurance or the Lord's blessing as the outcome of conversion, usefulness is the end goal of Harriet's U-shaped narrative. By narrating her spiritual experiences according to the well-established literary tradition of conversion, Harriet's decision to participate in the missionary cause was understood to be a spiritual work or fruit, rather than the search for excitement some accused her of. By situating the argument for it within long held and traditional spiritual narrative patterns, the strength and force of Harriet's memoir lay precisely in the way it demonstrated that such a new and uncertain movement as that of missions could be owned by American women. The context may have been new – increased literacy and education among women, renewed interest in the heathen due to belief in the approaching millennium, a theology which

emphasized disinterested benevolence – but because the pattern of the narrative retained similarities with those that came before in the evangelical tradition, a forceful argument could be made. Women were translating the Christian message and its 19th century articulations into their particular contexts, and the memoir of Harriet Newell was a powerful argument for why they should be allowed to do so.

A. Literary Canonization

In 1811 and 1812, Harriet Atwood and Ann Hasseltine agreed to marry Samuel Newell and Adoniram Judson respectively and leave their homes as wives of the first American missionaries.² At the time of these decisions, neither woman was considered remarkable. Both were greatly respected as evangelical women who had been converted and educated, and who desired to be useful; yet, they were not necessarily different from the many admirable young women in their communities who had similarly demonstrated the evangelical life and shared the same desires. In deciding to leave their homes and participate in the cause of missions, however, Harriet and Ann quickly gained notoriety.³

In fact, the ordinariness of their lives was very much significant for the impact they made on the evangelical community – what better example of disinterested benevolence could there be than ordinarily gifted women with the best education and the most rigorous spiritual faith forsaking all to suffer for the heathen? The already exciting idea of foreign missions was now linked to feminine heroism. Something new was taking

² In this paper I do not include discussion of Roxana Nott. This is not because her life was unimportant to the missionary cause, but rather because no memoir was published in her honor and thus discussion of her life falls outside the scope of this study.

³ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson, The Dramatic Events of the First American Foreign Mission, and the Course of Evangelical Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 20.

place – Americans entered the work of missions alongside the British, but the primary symbol of the movement were the wives the missionaries would take along.

When Samuel Newell and Adoniram Judson asked Harriet Atwood and Ann Hasseltine for their hands in marriage, New England was full of the topic of missions. Americans were deeply interested in the work of William Carey and the British missionary societies and became dedicated readers of British missionary publications. By the early 1800s, American missionary publications had been started in their own right to keep the population abreast of British doings; the *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* (later the *Panopolist*), the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, and the *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* were the longest running. In America, this interest not only harkened back to early Puritan attempts to evangelize the Native Americans, but was also closely connected to concerns over the religious and spiritual health of American settlers on the frontier. Missions (overseas and domestic), concerts of prayers, and revivals were all connected together as signs of the approaching millennial age.⁴

Women in New England were a particularly powerful force in the rise of interest in overseas missions. Of particular significance for women were the reports of female subjugation by heathen societies. Perhaps because their newfound access to education was a significant source of pride for American women in New England, the lack of female education among the heathens proved to be an important issue for raising interest in foreign missions. More even than the lack of educational opportunity, practices such as self-immolation, infanticide, and physical confinement alarmed American women concerning the situation of foreign, and particularly Asian, women. The gospel was

⁴ Lisa Joy Pruitt, *A Looking-Glass for Ladies: American Protestant Women and the Orient in the Nineteenth Century* (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 2005), 12-14.

needed by all, but women additionally needed social elevation. The result was that at least a decade before the first band of missionaries was sent out from America's shores, women were efficiently organizing themselves into mite societies and prayer groups to aid the British endeavors.⁵

Both Harriet and Ann's social circles were connected to the cause of missions. Propulsion for the launching of the American missions movement had followed a number of students from Williams College to Andover Theological Seminary.⁶ While at Andover, Samuel Newell and Adoniram Judson, along with two other key men, brought forth their famous proposal to the Congregational General Association to petition support for their missionary desires. This meeting took place in Bradford, Massachusetts, where Adoniram lodged with Deacon Hasseltine, Ann's father.⁷ As the journals of both women note, the increased missionary zeal which followed the meeting in Bradford traveled quickly among the women's social circles.

Additionally, Ann had come into contact with Henry Obookiah, a Hawaiian native and eventual convert who greatly influenced the missions movement in New England. Obookiah had arrived in New Haven in 1809 and associated there with a number of Yale students. In 1810 Obookiah met Samuel J. Mills, an eventual associate of Adoniram Judson; when Mills entered the seminary at Andover, Obookiah joined him. Though Obookiah greatly enjoyed the students he met at Andover, the school was not yet a good fit for his academic needs and he moved on to attend Bradford Academy where

⁵ For more extensive examination of women's financial contributions, see R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980), 13-34. For a thorough look at the motivation of social elevation for women, as well as the issue of "orientalism," see Lisa Joy Pruitt, *A Looking-Glass for Ladies*.

⁶ Brumberg, *Mission for Life*, 24-28.

⁷ Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 6.

Ann herself had studied. Interestingly, Obookiah boarded with Ann's family during this period. Not only was New England growing in general awareness of the cause of missions, but Ann had direct contact with a member of the "heathen" right in her own home.⁸

During this same period, both women increased their consideration of missions. Ann read Jonathan Edward's *Life of David Brainerd* in March 1809 and felt led to pray for "the heathen world, and the African slaves."⁹ Later that same month, she wrote in her journal, "I have at times felt engaged in prayer for the prosperity of the church, and for the conversion of the heathen and Jews."¹⁰ A year later in August, one month before she considered Adoniram Judson's proposal, Ann decided she was willing to let God place her anywhere she might "do the most good" even if it were among the "heathen."¹¹

Likewise, Harriet's attention to missions increased in 1809. She first mentioned concern for the heathen in her journal in July after attending church one Sunday morning. Perhaps after hearing a sermon in which the heathen were mentioned, Harriet wrote, "What am I that I should be blessed with the gospel's joyful sound, while so many are now perishing in heathen darkness for lack of the knowledge of Christ?"¹² This contrasting of the privileges of Christians with the misfortunes of the heathen became a theme for her; over the next month, Harriet contemplated in her journal and letters why the privileges of the

⁸ Brumberg, *Mission for Life*, 26-28.

⁹ James D. Knowles, *Memoir of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah. Including a History of the American Baptist Mission in the Burman Empire* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmans, 1829), 31, Archive.org, accessed 23 February 2017.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 37.

¹² Leonard Woods, D.D., *A Sermon, Preached at Haverhill, Mass. In Remembrance of Mrs. Harriet Newell, Wife of the Rev. Samuel Newell, Missionary to India. Who Died at the Isle of France, Nov. 30, 1812, Aged 19 Years. To Which Are Added Memoirs of Her Life* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1814), 26, Archive.org, accessed 16 September 2016.

gospel were not taken away from cold Christians who neglect their savior and given to the heathen who had never heard.¹³

A little more than a year later, Harriet was shocked when her friend Ann personally announced her decision to leave America as a missionary. She wrote, “I have felt more for the salvation of the heathen this day, than I recollect to have felt through my whole past life.”¹⁴ Ann’s decision became a catalyst for Harriet’s own consideration of missions, “What heart but would bleed at the idea of the sufferings they endure, to obtain the joys of Paradise? What can I do, that the light of the gospel may shine upon them? They are perishing for lack of knowledge, when I enjoy the glorious privileges of a Christian land. Great God, direct me! Oh, make me in some way beneficial to their immortal souls!”¹⁵ Shaping up to be a great year of change for Harriet, she was introduced to Samuel Newell three days after Ann’s announcement. Knowing that he planned to spend his life preaching among “the pagans,” her encounter with Newell was a further catalyst in the self-examination of her duties to renounce the world and become useful to the heathen.¹⁶

As Harriet and Ann prepared to leave America and sail for India, no official policy existed regarding wives.¹⁷ Many were opposed to the idea, but it seems Adoniram was particularly insistent on not departing unmarried.¹⁸ In many respects, the first American overseas missionaries attempted to model themselves off of William Carey,

¹³ Woods, *A Sermon*, 49.

¹⁴ Ibid., 65.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹⁷ Dana L. Robert, “The Influence of American Missionary Women on the World Back Home,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 12, No. 1 (Winter, 2002), 61.

¹⁸ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 18.

who strongly insisted on the inclusion of wives.¹⁹ Ultimately, the “usefulness” of women later developed into a full-fledged missiological argument for permission to take wives; but for Harriet, Ann, their husbands, and the fledgling mission board, the matter was highly questionable.²⁰

For these first missionary wives, the question of whether to go was very much their own and their examples set the precedent for decades to come. For both Harriet and Ann, serious consideration of the missionary life was precipitated by a marriage proposal; however, both considered Newell and Judson’s offers with utmost seriousness not just as marriage proposals, but also as vocational invitations. In the early American woman’s sphere, marriage could be a vocational choice. For Harriet and Ann, this reality put their commitment to usefulness for Christ to the ultimate test.²¹

Ann required two months to consider her marriage proposal and belabored the issue in her journal. Adoniram’s proposal caused her to completely reexamine the foundations of her Christian life and she asked herself “whether my love to Jesus was sufficiently strong to induce me to forsake all for his cause.”²² She again wrestled with what would cause her to be “most useful” in life and searched for her “path of duty.”²³ Eventually, Ann was able to settle on a decision and find peace in the usefulness it would provide her:

I have strong hope, that in giving me such an opportunity of laboring for him, he will make me peculiarly useful. No matter where I am, if I do but serve the infinitely blessed God; and it is my comfort, that he can prepare me to serve him.

¹⁹ Pruitt, *A Looking-Glass for Ladies*, 47-49.

²⁰ Woods, *A Sermon*, 76-77.

²¹ For discussion of marriage as vocational choice, see Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 74-98, and Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 18-24.

²² Knowles, *Memoir of Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 38.

Blessed Jesus, I am thine forever. Do with me what thou wilt; lead me in the path in which thou wouldst have me go, and it is enough.²⁴

Unlike Ann, Harriet's proposal required a quicker answer. She and Newell had encountered each other on numerous occasions and already befriended one another when she received "a long dreaded" letter with his proposal.²⁵ Harriet delayed as long as she could, wrestling significantly over the offer. Interestingly, Newell visited her often to discuss the matter, but she mentioned in her journal that he did not wish to influence her. In fact, she wrote, "...he would not if he could."²⁶ For both women, the decision had to be their own. Their proposed husbands expected them to share in their sense of calling to the same degree to which the men were led, even if their spheres of usefulness on the field were to differ. Before a month was up, Harriet agreed to marry Newell and join her friend Ann. Writing about her work in support of her new husband, Harriet joyfully wrote, "This is the sphere in which I expect to be useful, while life is prolonged."²⁷

When Harriet and Ann left America's shores, between 1,500 and 2,000 people attended the missionary band's farewell service.²⁸ Preached in Harriet's hometown of Haverhill, Massachusetts, by the Rev. Jonathan Allen, Ann's minister and close friend of the Judsons, the ordination and charge sermon was a longstanding Puritan tradition to honor and exhort new ministers.²⁹ His sermon highlighted the millennial fulfillment of God's prophecies as the spiritual powers of the world were felled and people from the whole world were brought into the Lord's flock.³⁰ But as Dana L. Robert has noted,

²⁴ Woods, *A Sermon*, 40.

²⁵ Ibid., 73.

²⁶ Ibid., 76.

²⁷ Ibid., 112.

²⁸ Robert, "The Influence of American Missionary Women," 60.

²⁹ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 2.

³⁰ Jonathan Allen, "A Sermon. Delivered at Haverhill, February 5, 1812, on the occasion of the young ladies being about to embark as the wives of Rev. Messieurs Judson and Newell, going Missionaries

“Allen felt a personal commitment to the success of sending out women with the very first group of American foreign missionaries,” and as such delivered a particular charge directly to Harriet and Ann.³¹ Though the wives were only designated as “assistant missionaries,” Allen’s charge was notable as most likely the first such sermon setting women apart for a ministerial role in their own right.³²

In his sermon, Allen brought the women’s work into “the best of causes,” tying it directly into that for which Jesus suffered and died. Though the women would not be preaching, Allen believed, “In this employment, you, probably, have an arduous work before you – A work, that will occupy all your talents and much of your time.”³³ For these missionary wives, their work was not simply the conversion of heathen women’s souls, but also the social elevation of women in foreign lands.³⁴ Allen concluded his portion directed at Harriet and Ann with the words, “Should you be able, in any measure, to raise the female character in the east, and bring but a small portion of them to know their Savior, it will undoubtedly, afford you great satisfaction.”³⁵ Again, as Robert observes, “In his speech to the women, Allen made the revolutionary assumption that the biblical mandate to ‘Go’ was incumbent upon the women as well as the men of the church.”³⁶ For these first missionary wives, the work to which they traveled was particularly women’s work, but the burden and responsibility of the Christian call to missions, and ultimately to “usefulness,” was no less great for women than for men.

to India,” in *Pioneers in Mission: The Early Missionary Ordination Sermons, Charges, and Instructions. A Source Book on the Rise of American Missions to the Heathen*, edited by R. Peirce Beaver (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1966), 269-278.

³¹ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 2.

³² Ibid., 1.

³³ Allen, “A Sermon,” 276.

³⁴ Robert, 3.

³⁵ Allen, 277.

³⁶ Robert, 3.

Though the departure of the missionary band was both remarkable and catalytic in its own right, the death of Harriet Newell, the youngest of the band, within a year of their departure drew overwhelming attention to the efforts of the mission. The details of Harriet's death were tragic enough for any novel. Unable to begin their work in India due to regulations by the British East India Company against missionary activity, the Newells set sail for the Isle of France. Harriet was several months pregnant and the missionaries hoped she would be able to find stable residence before the arrival of her child. However, once they were aboard their journey became harrowing as the ship battled sea storms and sprung a leak. As the journey doubled in length, Harriet protracted dysentery and gave birth prematurely. The infant died aboard the ship and Harriet herself passed away twenty days after finally arriving at her destination.³⁷ Importantly, Harriet was recorded as dying with no regrets for offering her life to the missionary cause, a vital statement that turned her death from a major publicity blow into the canonization of Harriet as the first American martyr to the missionary cause.³⁸ As Mary Kupiec Cayton has demonstrated, the death and subsequent canonization of Harriet Newell was as significant to the American evangelical imagination as that of David Brainerd a century earlier, though perhaps her legacy has been less well remembered by subsequent generations. In the first half of the 19th century, Harriet was often remembered before any other as the figure which most ignited the American missions movement through the sacrifice of her life.³⁹

³⁷ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 41.

³⁸ Ibid. Woods, *A Sermon*, 150-151.

³⁹ Mary Kupiec Cayton, "Canonizing Harriet Newell: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement in New England, 1800-1840," in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*, ed. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 69.

Crucial to the influence Harriet held over the American evangelical landscape was the literary and print culture in which her life and death were memorialized. Through the new emphasis on the textual community and the religious focus on the usefulness of women, Harriet skyrocketed to become the symbol of evangelical womanhood. Cayton writes, “Newell’s story came to symbolize for many women evangelicals the central role they had been called to play in world history. Heroines of a new culture, an ‘imagined community’ galvanized through the publication and dissemination of missionary narratives, they helped to create a new place for middle-class women as influential actors in the public realm.”⁴⁰ As evangelical literature concerning missionary endeavors was distributed and read in homes and prayer meetings, new examples of female piety disseminated among the readership.⁴¹ By including mention of the female missionary assistants in evangelical magazines like the *Panopolist*, women were brought into the evangelical literary tradition of David Brainerd, John Sergeant, and William Carey.⁴² Without the newly established evangelical print networks and community, Harriet’s story may well have ended without notice.⁴³

Upon the missionaries’ departure, the ABCFM worked to keep the evangelical public abreast of their situation. Reports back to the board from the male members of the party were published monthly, and personal correspondence from the female members of the band was included.⁴⁴ Initially, the identities of Harriet and Ann were kept hidden in order to keep the domestic lives and feminine piety of the women veiled from the public

⁴⁰ Cayton, “Canonizing Harriet Newell,” 69-70.

⁴¹ Ibid., 73.

⁴² Ibid., 81.

⁴³ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 81-82.

eye.⁴⁵ However, within the first year, the identities of individual female writers were revealed as they took on greater roles in corresponding with those back home.⁴⁶ As the women of the group became more prominent through their writing, the American public became increasingly fascinated by the exotic lives of the first missionaries.⁴⁷

After her death, Harriet's account of her life and her husband's account of her demise and deathbed were quickly disseminated for the evangelical textual community. A series of journal extracts and the account of Harriet's death were first published in the *Panopolist* in August 1813.⁴⁸ Though unusual for female writing to be given such prominent attention, the ABCFM quickly promoted the subsequent publication and dissemination of Harriet's memoir largely due to the lack of information concerning the missionary band available to pass on to a hungry public in the wake of the war with Britain. As cross Atlantic communication with its missionaries dried up amidst rising tensions on the seas, Harriet's posthumous memoir filled a significant void of information.⁴⁹ Whereas her journals were and would have continued to be published only sporadically in the course of her lifetime, upon her death, the literary tradition of memorializing exemplary Christians was quickly used to promote her example and justify her sacrifice.⁵⁰

Upholding early 19th century gender standards, Harriet's memoir was heavily mediated through male editors. Her husband was responsible for the first edit, choosing to return Harriet's personal writing to the United States.⁵¹ Upon receiving Harriet's

⁴⁵ Cayton, "Canonizing Harriet Newell," 80-82.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 82-83.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 83-84.

⁵¹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 152-154.

journal and correspondence in from the field, the ABCFM then utilized Leonard Woods, a minister and professor at Andover Theological Seminary, to introduce, compile, and ultimately officially author the memoir. Symbolizing the degree to which a woman's literary voice could not yet stand on its own, Woods was careful to state that Harriet would never have wished to publish her writing herself, but that the work must be published due to its unusual, public exemplariness.⁵² He writes:

The letters and journal of this unambitious, delicate female would have been kept within the circle of her particular friends, had not the closing scenes of her life, and the missionary zeal, which has recently been kindled in this country, excited in the public mind a lively interest in her character, and given the christian community a kind of property in the productions of her pen.⁵³

With careful spiritual and cultural hedging of the reasons for publishing her writing, Harriet's memoir was promoted as vital to understanding the missionary cause.⁵⁴

As Cayton demonstrates in her study, Harriet's memoir was widely popular and rivaled that of David Brainerd. Between 1814 and 1840, Harriet's memoir went through fifty editions printed in twelve different cities, including all of the major American and British cities.⁵⁵ One of the most interesting discoveries unearthed by Cayton was the sudden naming of girls "Harriet Newell" after the publication of her memoir.⁵⁶ Not counting Harriet N.s or simply the increase in Harriets, Cayton found, "...the given name Harriet Newell [not including surname] does not appear in genealogies prior to 1814 but shows up suddenly in 1814 and continues to be a notable choice for daughters for some time thereafter."⁵⁷ These Harriet Newells were found mostly in New England, but also in

⁵² Woods, *A Sermon*, 25.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Cayton, "Canonizing Harriet Newell," 84-85.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 87.

areas where Calvinist traditions were strongest, leading Cayton to conclude, “Harriet Newells covered the countryside in the places that gave rise to and sustained benevolent empire reform activities.”⁵⁸ As a symbol of the effectiveness of the evangelical textual community and of the importance of women and feminine spirituality to the rise of the missionary movement, parents across those regions influenced by the ABCFM were so fundamentally moved by Harriet Newell’s narrative that they chose to give her full name to their daughters. As Cayton writes, “Harriet Newell’s story shows how a new evangelical literature by and for women constructed a social imaginary in which saving the world was not only women’s work, but her truest, best, and most heroic role.”⁵⁹ As such, gaining a more thorough understanding of the memoir itself remains an important historical project.

B. The U-Shape Narrative as Sign for the Community

Within Harriet Newell’s memoir, we find a familiar narrative pattern. A similar U-shaped narrative of conversion reflecting both the narratives of the Puritans and of earlier evangelicals is clearly seen in Harriet’s memoir; in fact, framing the narrative according to such earlier literary traditions of communicating conversion was crucial in order for Harriet’s memoir to serve as a sign and symbol for the evangelical community and to produce the powerful impact the memoir had. The familiar U-shape of Harriet’s narrative marked it as an induction to the new religious community of missionary wives; a defense of the religious experiences and actions of those wives; and as a pedagogical work for both women and men hoping to emulate the subject.

⁵⁸ Cayton, “Canonizing Harriet Newell,” 87.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 88.

After a brief introduction to Harriet Newell's general character and the inclusion of a brief letter highlighting the same, Harriet's personal account of her conversion opens the narrative. Written shortly after her entrance to church membership, Harriet provides the traditional condensed narrative of her spiritual experiences. She starts by stating that her earliest childhood years were spent in spiritual ignorance, specifically mentioning the spiritual darkness that surrounded her while attending dancing school; and though she determined at times to become religious, her efforts were of no avail.⁶⁰ Harriet recalls being sent to Bradford Academy in 1806 when she was thirteen years old, an institution which she gratefully remembers for its impact on her spiritual state – for while a pupil there, Harriet participated in a spiritual awakening among the academy students. In her initial awakening, Harriet is convicted of her sins and casts her soul upon Jesus, an act she initially describes as providing "...sweet peace, a heavenly calmness, which I never can describe."⁶¹ Though she renounces her worldly friends, Harriet does not commit herself to the church, something which eventually causes her to fall back into spiritual darkness despite her awakening.⁶²

It is not until three years later that Harriet's experience of conversion is complete.⁶³ Upon leaving Bradford and returning home to Haverhill, Harriet abandons the evangelical disciplines of religious reading and sober companionship that she learned while at Bradford, and instead she wavers in rebellion despite a bothered conscience, knowledge of true religion, and the deaths of multiple close family members.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Woods, *A Sermon*, 28.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Others have considered her initial awakening at Bradford as her conversion; however, I disagree with such a reading of the text. Neither Woods, nor Harriet, credit her first experience of awakening with true spiritual conversion, as I hope to demonstrate in the following pages.

⁶⁴ Woods, 29-30.

Ultimately, Harriet is fully convicted of her sinful state while visiting a friend in Newburyport, Massachusetts. During this trip, Harriet hears a sermon that brings her to full awareness of her spiritual helplessness. She writes, “How did the truths, which he delivered, sink deep into my inmost soul! My past transgressions rose like great mountains before me. The most poignant anguish seized my mind my carnal security fled; and I felt myself naked before a holy God.”⁶⁵ Like many before her in the Puritan and evangelical traditions, Harriet’s conversion finally comes at her lowest spiritual moment.

At the conclusion of her visit, Harriet converses with an older male companion while journeying back to Haverhill and it is due to their conversation that she resolves “to make a sincere dedication of my all to my Creator, both for time and eternity.”⁶⁶ Harriet soon decides it is her duty to join the church and profess “publically on which side I was.”⁶⁷ As she closes her conversion narrative written shortly after her first communion, Harriet praises God, writing, “This was a precious season long to be remembered! – Oh the depths of sovereign grace! Eternity will be too short to celebrate the perfections of God.”⁶⁸

While this short account is offered at the beginning of the narrative as the spiritual foundation upon which the memoir rests, it is within the following extracts from Harriet’s diary and letters that the full significance of her conversion narrative is drawn out. As she engages in spiritual journaling and participates through correspondence in the evangelical community, the three-year long narrative tracks Harriet’s experiences from the stasis of

⁶⁵ Woods, *A Sermon*, 30.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

spiritual ignorance along the downward slope of awareness of sin through awakening to the bottom of the U, at which point complete spiritual hopelessness ultimately ushers in conversion. After the conversion experience, the final journey along the upward curve toward church membership commences, mapping out the standard U-shape. Of particular note and interest to this paper, Harriet's letters and diary entries communicate a new goal beyond that of church membership – the spiritual fruit of usefulness.

Awakenings were common among the adolescents of evangelical educational institutions and Harriet frequently cites her time at Bradford Academy as one of the most spiritually significant of her life. Crucial to Harriet's experience was the companionship she found with other girls similarly awakened and impressed with convictions of seriousness, and even after her departure from the academy, Harriet recounts that her spiritual friendships sustained her newly awakened state for many months.⁶⁹ In entries describing her reliance on female companionship for her spiritual growth, Harriet writes, "A dear Christian sister called on me this afternoon. Her pious conversation produced a solemn but pleasing effect upon my mind. Shall I ever be so unspeakably happy as to enjoy the society of holy beings in heaven?"⁷⁰ And:

This evening has been very pleasantly spent with my companions, H. and S.B. The attachment which commenced as it were in infancy has been greatly strengthened since their minds have been religiously impressed. How differently are our evenings spent now, from what they formerly were! How many evenings have I spent with them in thoughtless vanity and giddy mirth. We have been united in the service of Satan; Oh that we might now be united in the service of God.⁷¹

Harriet's disciplined spiritual state continued well into 1807; however, by the end of the year she shows signs of a heightened awareness of the hardness of her heart. In

⁶⁹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 31-32.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

May, she records a spiritual high, writing in her diary that, “All I do for Jesus is pleasant,” and she ponders where the cross is that would require her suffering, as she longs to depart from the world and be with Jesus.⁷² As religion remains the most important topic of her correspondence with friends, Harriet starts to contemplate the inner workings of her soul, particularly her affections, and it is within these contemplations that she becomes aware of the dark state of her heart.⁷³ Utilizing language heavily reminiscent of Jonathan Edwards’s work on the religious affections, Harriet writes, “Oh my dear Miss W. why are our affections placed one moment upon this world, when the great things of religion are of such vast importance? Oh that God would rend his heavens and come down, and awaken our stupid drowsy senses.”⁷⁴ In fact, “stupid” becomes Harriet’s favorite descriptor for the dark spiritual state in which she finds herself and she repeats the word frequently throughout her journal and letters to describe herself and other Christians who do not live as ones who have been converted. By the end of the year, Harriet is just as committed to discussing religion with her female correspondents as before; however, she is increasingly aware of the danger of her spiritual state. She writes, “Pray that your friend Harriet may no longer be so stupid and inattentive to the great concerns of religion. Pray that she may be aroused from this lethargic state and attend to Christ’s call.”⁷⁵

As Harriet enters 1808, she is no less aware of what she considers spiritual truth – her need for a savior to rescue her from her sinful state – yet, she is less and less committed to the practices which she knows will secure her conversion. Though she does

⁷² Woods, *A Sermon*, 34.

⁷³ Ibid., 36-37.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 39.

not mention such activities in her correspondence, in her conversion narrative it is during this period that she recounts giving up religious reading in favor of romances and novels. During this time, no journal entries are included in the memoir, suggesting the possibility that she had stopped the spiritual writing practices, as well.⁷⁶

In her correspondence, Harriet begins to request her friends' assistance in awakening her from the darkness of her heart, as well as declining their aid for their own spiritual needs, suggesting that they too were uncertain of the final outcome of the Bradford awakening.⁷⁷ In the postscript to a letter in which she vehemently recounts the evangelical gospel as the truth she and her companions need and must embrace, Harriet writes, "P.S. I long to see you and unfold to you the inmost recesses of my heart. Do make it convenient to visit H. this spring, and although it may be displeasing to you to hear the wickedness of your friend Harriet's heart, yet perhaps you, my dear W. can say something which will now make me resolve in earnest, that, let others serve whom they will, I will serve the Lord."⁷⁸ Though Harriet is soon thereafter confronted with the death of a beloved uncle and the lurking passing of her own father (events which commonly sparked final conversion among those close to the deceased), she responds to a friend, "You ask me to write to you, and to write something that will awaken you from stupidity. I would, my dear C. but I am still in the same careless state."⁷⁹ Midway through the year, Harriet's father dies and the year is noted for her spiritual decline and darkness.⁸⁰ As she neglects the love for the scriptures and retirement that the Bradford awakening had

⁷⁶ Woods, *A Sermon*, 29.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 41-42.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 43.

instilled in her, she spends more time in frivolous activities with “gay” companions.⁸¹

Though Harriet knows the marks of true religion and can speak freely and even passionately of it with her correspondents, yet she describes the continued unconverted state of her heart. As she enters 1809, she describes herself as not yet choosing fully to “serve the Lord.”⁸²

Harriet continues to lament her state, writing to a friend that her attention has been given to “worldly engagements and occupations;” however, by midyear, she is once again convicted of her eternal state and finally able to make her public profession of faith.⁸³ Resuming her journal once again in July, shortly after her conversion experience, Harriet resolves to dedicate her life to Christ. She writes:

God has pleased in infinite mercy, again to call up my attention to eternal realities. After spending more than a year, in the vanities of the world – thoughtless and unconcerned respecting my eternal welfare, he has, as I humbly trust, showed me my awful backsliding from him, and my dependence upon his grace for every blessing.

I do now, in the strength of Jesus, resolve, that I will no longer sacrifice my immortal soul for what I have *hitherto* deemed my temporal happiness. Oh that I might be enabled to come out from the world, and to profess Christ as my Redeemer before multitudes. I now see, that I have enjoyed no happiness in my pursuit of worldly pleasure. Not in the playroom – not in the vain and idle conversation of my companions, not in the bustle of a crowded life, have I found happiness. This heaven-born guest is found only in the bosom of the child of Jesus. How awfully aggravated will be my condition, if I do not, after this second call, awaken all my drowsy faculties and become earnestly engaged for God.⁸⁴

As demonstrated through faithful journaling of her spiritual growth and her continued correspondence with religious companions, it is in this second and final awakening that Harriet receives and obeys the call to faith and repentance.

⁸¹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 43.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

At this point in the narrative, Harriet's experience begins to demonstrate movement along the upward curve of the U-shape. Her conversion has taken place and the narrative moves on to the results of the experience – the spiritual fruit in her life that conversion produces. It is precisely the inclusion of this U-shaped narrative that establishes Harriet as a Christian exemplar. It serves as a sign to the evangelical textual community that though the subject and circumstances of the narrative may be unusual, the religious substance of it is familiar. Though Harriet is a woman and the topic of usefulness and missions might be strange, the pattern of the story reflects earlier evangelical canon and frames the argument of the narrative in a familiar and spiritually recognizable light. It enables the narrative to communicate something new while referencing established and admired patterns, thereby introducing the new plot of female usefulness from which others might learn.

C. "Usefulness" as the Necessary Outcome of Conversion

Because her conversion narrative signifies Harriet's place within evangelical tradition, the foundation for demonstrating her spiritual significance and exemplariness is well established. Upon the completion of her conversion, though, Harriet's memoir dedicates the majority of her pre-departure narrative to demonstrating how her conversion necessarily resulted in the decision to join the missionary endeavor. Her conversion serves only as the prelude to the most extensive portion of the text – the process by which Harriet's conversion necessarily leads her to "usefulness." Harriet's decision to marry a missionary and travel overseas is not depicted as an arbitrary decision; rather, it is portrayed as necessary spiritual fruit in her life. The process and

experience of conversion leads her to seek the means by which she may be useful in the light of eternity and it is this commitment to usefulness which takes her overseas.

There is evidence in Harriet's writing that "usefulness" weighed on her mind even before her conversion; however, it played a convicting role as something which reminded her of her as yet unrepentant state. Duty to God and the improvement of self and time figure prominently in her laments over her spiritual state, and foreshadow her later language of usefulness.⁸⁵ In one letter to a sister living away from home and teaching young pupils, Harriet strongly admonishes her on the seriousness of her job, warning that as a teacher, her sister will either be judged for negligence towards her pupils or awarded with eternal happiness for carrying out the task of converting young souls.⁸⁶ Contrasting herself with such an example of spiritual duty, Harriet speaks of her idleness as evidence of spiritual darkness. Writing to a friend in 1808, while amidst the lowest point of her spiritual experiences, she declares:

You observed, your contemplations had frequently dwelt on those hours, we spent in each others' society, while at Bradford Academy; and that you regretted the misimprovement of them Alas! how many hours have we spent in trifling conversation, which will avail us nothing... Will the recollection of the moments that are now speeding their flight, afford satisfaction at the last? Oh, that we might improve our time and talents to the glory of God, that the review of them may be pleasing.⁸⁷

And again, shortly before her conversion in 1809, Harriet considers her neglect of spiritual improvement as evidence of her spiritual state, writing:

In the morning of life when no perplexing cares interrupt or vex our minds, we should spend every moment of our time in improving our minds, by reading, or attending to conversation that is beneficial. Our time is short! Perhaps we may be

⁸⁵ Woods, *A Sermon*, 34-36.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

cut off in the morning of our days. Oh that we might improve each moment of our lives, "And make each day a critic on the last."⁸⁸

In these passages, Harriet speaks of misuse of time and talent in order to remind herself and her correspondents of their continued need for salvation. Christian conversion was understood to induce one to carry out her duty to God, improving herself for his glory and for the benefit of those around her. Lack of improvement evidenced by uselessness demonstrated that the individual remained unconverted.

Important for understanding the concept of usefulness for Harriet and her contemporaries is the degree to which eternity overshadowed their understanding of the Christian life. The more eternity presses upon her mind in her journal and letters, the more urgently Harriet considers her usefulness. Before her conversion, eternity represented the spiritual judgement which awaited her, and hence the testing of her life on earth. She writes:

Is religion and the concerns of futurity still the object of your attention? New scenes daily open to us, and there is the greatest reason to fear that some of us will fall short at last of an interest in Jesus Christ. A few more rising and setting suns, and we shall be called to give an account for our final Judge, of the manner in which we have improved our probationary state; then, then, the religion we profess, – will it stand the test? Oh! let us with the greatest care, examine ourselves, and see if our religion will cover us from the storms of divine wrath; – whether our chief desire is to glorify God, to honor his cause, and to become entirely devoted to him. What a word is ETERNITY! Let us reflect upon it; although we cannot penetrate into its unsearchable depths, yet perhaps it may have an impressive weight upon our minds, and lead us to a constant preparation for that hour, when we shall enter the confines of that state, and be either happy or miserable through an endless duration.⁸⁹

After her conversion, eternity takes on a new light. It remains a reminder of the judgement which she will one day face; but now it is the promise of final eternal bliss and

⁸⁸ Woods, *A Sermon*, 44.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

joy with Christ that undergirds her understanding of her duty.⁹⁰ Closely connected is the hope of the approaching millennial age. Though Harriet frequently finds herself longing for the release and completion she will find in eternity, the millennium signifies that great work is first to be done on earth. She writes, “Oh, that he would hasten that happy period, when the whole earth shall be brought to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Let us frequently and earnestly intercede at the throne of grace, for the commencement of the Millennium.”⁹¹ As the outworking of the spiritual hope of eternity and the theological belief in the millennium, usefulness becomes an important spiritual fruit in the life of the Christian.

In 1809 as Harriet considers how to live as a Christian post conversion, her writing becomes increasingly consumed with questions concerning her duty to God, her purpose on this earth, and the needs of the “heathen.” Upon resuming her journal, Harriet ponders questions that resound again and again until her departure. She frequently asks herself, “What have I done for God?” and, “...how sincerely ought I to be engaged for him?”⁹² Recognizing that her affections determine her actions, she requests the Spirit to “Breathe into my soul a flame of ardent love,” so that she might faithfully serve God.⁹³ With her affections rightly ordered, Harriet may better understand her purpose on earth – whereas eternity offers her full and everlasting rest, the confines of time require her active service of God and the unconverted.⁹⁴ She writes:

Another week has rolled away, and my probationary existence is still lengthened out. But to what purpose do I live? Why am I supported in this world of *hope*, when I am daily transgressing the laws of a holy God, and grieving his blessed

⁹⁰ Woods, *A Sermon*, 57, 67, 71, 90.

⁹¹ Ibid., 57.

⁹² Ibid., 45.

⁹³ Ibid., 47-48.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 49-50.

Spirit? ... Spare me, Oh my God, spare me, yet a little longer, and by thy grace enable me, to do *some little* work in thy vineyard.⁹⁵

Harriet starts to act upon her desire to improve upon God's grace in a variety of ways. She warns her companions of their need for repentance and wrestles with God in prayer over the conversion of sinners.⁹⁶ She attends prayer conferences regularly and even a fast.⁹⁷ She improves her mind through reading her Bible and attends a local reading society in order to better understand the world, writing, "Sincerely wish, it might be the means of improving our minds in the knowledge of our *own*, and *other* countries. And Oh, that from a knowledge of the world which God has made, our minds might be led to the Creator."⁹⁸ Struggling with the way she acts when in the public company of others, Harriet even considers if staying always at home would help her to be holier. Ultimately it is her desire to do good for others that causes her to decide against such a rash decision.⁹⁹ As she struggles between the idle desires of her heart and the religious affections which should motivate her actions, usefulness becomes the way for Harriet to channel energy which might otherwise go to frivolous endeavors. She writes:

Possessed naturally, with such a rude and ungovernable disposition, I sometimes, find it difficult to keep within proper bounds. Often does my heart condemn me for my trifling conduct; - conscience reproaches; and frequently, I am led to the conclusion that I will no more leave the residence of my mother - have no more to do with the world, but seclude myself, and spend my few remaining days, *entirely* devoted to the Best of Beings. But this will not be following the example of the blessed Jesus. No, while I am in the world, let it be my constant endeavor, to do all the good I can to my fellow mortals - to rise above its frowns and flatteries, and give no occasion for any reproach to be brought upon the cause of religion.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Woods, *A Sermon*, 51.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45-46, 53, 56.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-51, 56.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49, 54.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

As part of her search for usefulness, Harriet faithfully participates in the evangelical textual community. Her journaling remains constant from the time of her conversion until shortly before her departure for India, and during a time of illness she recounts her inability to write in her diary for five weeks as suffering and spiritual negligence.¹⁰¹ Harriet faithfully exchanges letters not out of a desire for entertainment, but rather in the mutual desire to help fellow saints along the path to heaven.¹⁰² During the same illness in which she laments her lack of journaling, she receives a letter from a friend and calls it a “real treasure” which provides spiritual comfort and sustenance.¹⁰³ In a particularly clear description of the evangelical textual community, Harriet writes:

WHAT, my dear friend, (if I may enjoy the privilege of corresponding with you,) shall be the subject of our letters? Shall the common occurrences of life, and the flattering compliments of the *polite world* fill our sheets; or that religion, which is the glory of the bright intelligences of heaven, and the consolation of trembling believers on earth? I think I can confidently affirm that the latter will be *your* choice. As for *myself*, I can say that if I never felt the power of *this* religion, yet it is a theme upon which I love to converse, write and reflect. It is a duty incumbent on the children of God to reprove, encourage and animate each other on their journey to the upper world. Every christian has difficulties to overcome, temptations to encounter, and a warfare to accomplish, which the world are strangers to. If pilgrims in the same country can in the least console each other, and sweeten the thorny journey, by familiar intercourse, they ought not to neglect it.¹⁰⁴

Writing and correspondence serve a specific spiritual role for Harriet and her friends, one which is useful for encouraging each other’s dedication to Christ. By participating in the evangelical textual community in addition to the local religious community, Harriet

¹⁰¹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 59.

¹⁰² Ibid., 49.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 69.

connects with those who share her views, finding in her correspondence with friends the one place where she can disclose the secrets of her heart.¹⁰⁵

As Harriet continues to worry about her coldness and stupidity – attributes she holds in contrast to service to God – the connection she makes between ability and duty grows.¹⁰⁶ At one point, Harriet considers how many of her friends have been given more talents than she herself and what great things they could do for the kingdom were they converted. She wonders why God chose her for redemption, rather than her friends, given the limited abilities for service she sees in herself.¹⁰⁷ Harriet's equation of talent and gifting with what can and should be done spiritually demonstrates her growing belief in usefulness as the outcome of conversion, and she forms an interesting connection between her service to others and her own identity and spiritual state. In a convoluted mixture of who enacts spiritual good and who receives spiritual benefit, Harriet considers a sermon she recently attended and concludes that by failing to act on the behalf of others, she does herself spiritual harm. She writes:

Have again been permitted to attend a religious conference. Mr. T. preached from these words; "Do thyself no harm." How astonishing, that I can be so negligent in duty, when there are so many immortal souls around me, that are doing themselves *eternal* harm! Why do I not *feel* their awful condition, and solemnly warn them, both by precept and example, "to flee from the wrath to come?"¹⁰⁸

It is not long after that she picks up the actual language of usefulness:

Have been solemnly impressed with the worth of immortal souls this day. The welfare of my school companions, lies near my heart. In what way can I be serviceable to them? They have souls, as valuable as mine. Oh then, let me use my best endeavors to bring them to the knowledge of the truth, and save them from that awful punishment, which awaits the finally impenitent.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Woods, *A Sermon*, 57.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 64.

In 1810, at a crucial point in the narrative, Harriet mentions a meeting with Ann Hasseltine in which Ann shares her decision to depart for India. Harriet speaks of the meeting affecting her heart as she contemplates how much her friend is willing to do for God, writing, “Is she willing to do all this for God; and shall I refuse to lend my little aid, in a land where divine revelation has shed its clearest rays?”¹¹⁰ Harriet asks herself what she might do to give aid to the cause, citing the privileges she has received living in a Christian land as reason for her obligation. She closes the entry by crying out, “Great God direct me! Oh make me in *some* way beneficial to their immortal souls!”¹¹¹

From this point forward, Harriet’s path to usefulness is quickened. Within weeks, Harriet is visited by her future husband, Samuel Newell. Once again, Harriet is deeply challenged by his devotion to the gospel and commitment to missionary service and she questions the depth of her own faith and commitment in the light of it.¹¹² After this meeting Harriet becomes restless in considering her duty, even to the point of sleeplessness. Writing that “sleep has fled from me,” she beseeches God to “plainly mark out the path of duty, and let me not depart from it.”¹¹³ In order to work out this problem, she begins to read William Law’s *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* with the hope that it might show her how to be used by God.¹¹⁴ In contemplating her reading, she writes, “I am as much obligated to yield myself a willing soldier to Christ, to fight his battles, and glorify him, in every action of my life, as he who ministers at the altar, and performs the office of a preacher. Why then, am I not employed in his service? Why

¹¹⁰ Woods, *A Sermon*, 65.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 66.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 71. William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life; Adapted the State and Condition of All Orders of Christians* (Boston: T. Bedlington, 1821), Archive.org, accessed 8 February 2017.

stand I here *idle*, all the day?”¹¹⁵ Her conclusion is powerful; she is as obliged as male preachers to be employed for God. Usefulness is not a spiritual category for male religious leaders only, but rather, a necessary requirement for all converts, including women.

With the opening of 1811, despite continued spiritual peaks and valleys, Harriet’s convictions concerning usefulness turn into efforts to act usefully.¹¹⁶ At the beginning of the year, Harriet records that her mother desires for her to engage a school in the summer. Harriet is intimidated at the prospect, but nonetheless willing to comply in order that she might be useful “whether it be in the domestic circle, or in the arduous employment of ‘teaching young ideas how to shoot.’”¹¹⁷ She writes, “Can I think of such a responsible situation as that of instructing immortals? I know that I ought not to consult my own ease; the question should be, how can I be most useful in the world? I hope I shall be directed by Heaven! Oh that God would use me as an instrument of promoting his glory...”¹¹⁸

Shortly before receiving Newell’s proposal of marriage, Harriet’s search for usefulness reaches a spiritual height and her writing takes on a passionately poetic voice as if priming her soul for the momentous decision soon to befall her. In early March, one month before the proposal, Harriet admonishes her soul to awake from its slothfulness.

She writes:

This is a delightful evening! Not a cloud is in the heavens to intercept the bright rays of the moon. All nature, both animate and inanimate, appears combined in the blessed employment of praising God. the moon shining in her glory, and the planets and stars are monitors, that speak loud – more lovely to me, than ten

¹¹⁵ Woods, *A Sermon*, 66.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70, 71.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

thousand human voices. Awake my slothful soul; nothing in creation, has half thy work to perform; and Oh, let it not be said, that nothing is half so dull.¹¹⁹

Here, Harriet is once more contrasting sloth and usefulness in the recognition that her conversion requires the latter of her. As a redeemed soul, Harriet has been given work by God. To remain asleep in her comfort would cast doubt upon her eternal spiritual state.

These same sentiments are again recorded exactly one month later. In her last journal entry before all attention is turned to the decision to go overseas or not, Harriet writes:

What shall a stupid Christian do? Stupid Christian did I say! Can a *Christian* ever feel stupid? It is an inconsistent title. But notwithstanding all my death-like stupidity, I cannot renounce the hope of being a child of the Most High. What shall I do, a dependent, guilty creature, to gain access to the mercy seat, and derive a supply of grace from the fountain of life. Draw me, thou Saviour of sinner, and I will run after thee. Oh lead me beside the still waters, and refresh my soul with heavenly food.¹²⁰

It is important here to remember that “stupid” has been one of the primary attributes Harriet has held in contrast to usefulness, duty, and service; stupid has also connoted an unconverted state. In this entry, Harriet has reached the conclusion that it is inconsistent to be a Christian (i.e. converted) and to be stupid – the Christian will be made useful in the world as her life bears spiritual fruit. Nevertheless, when the Christian feels useless and stupid, spiritual sustenance is offered in the grace of God. Though Harriet may not yet have found her usefulness for the kingdom, she remains of child of God. She is confident that her spiritual fruit will grow as the Lord nourishes her with heavenly food. Because she has been converted, she will be made useful.

¹¹⁹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 72.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 73.

Still dwelling on these spiritual heights, Harriet receives the “long dreaded” letter containing Samuel’s proposal.¹²¹ With his offer of marriage, Harriet immediately recognizes that all of her spiritual ruminations must now be once and for all decided and acted upon. She recognizes that the proposal will cast her into “doubt, anxiety, and distress” as she is forced to reconcile her spiritual convictions with her life decisions.¹²² She writes, “How shall I decide this *important*, this *interesting* question? ... Oh, for direction from heaven! Oh for “that wisdom which is profitable to direct!” – I will go to God, and with an unprejudiced mind, seek his guidance. I will cast this heavy burden on him, humbly trusting that he will sustain me, and direct me in the path of duty.”¹²³

Harriet fundamentally desires to make the useful decision; yet, she struggles to understand what her duty truly is. She demonstrates concern for her widowed mother and decides that she will not act contrary to her mother’s wishes; the useful choice will not neglect her duty to her mother.¹²⁴ Yet her mother raises no objections, remaining calm and composed and leaving Harriet to continue struggling with her own conscience.¹²⁵ Interestingly, Harriet is very clear that Samuel himself cannot ultimately make the decision for her. Though she is obliged to her mother by duty, she feels no obligation to her suitor, demonstrating the extent to which marriage proposals provided women with a space in which to independently consider the future direction of their lives, as well as the agency with which usefulness was to be considered. Clearly stating that her struggle to identify her duty does not include Samuel, Harriet writes to a friend, “Mr. N. has visited

¹²¹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 73.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 76.

us frequently. He wishes not to influence me; he would not if he could.”¹²⁶ With her mother’s acquiescence and continuing to contemplate her rightful duty in search of usefulness, Harriet makes it clear that the question will be answered by determining her *spiritual* duty. Foreshadowing both her final decision and her future fate, Harriet hopes her potential future marriage will help wean her from the world, writing, “Some circumstances, which at some future time I may communicate to you, I hope will have a tendency to wean me from this world, and fasten my heart to Heaven. I do, my dear friend, find this, ‘a desert world, replete with sin and sorrow.’ I often long to leave it, and find a sweet release from every woe.”¹²⁷

Despite the concerns and disapproval of some of her closest kin, Harriet decides to accept the proposal largely for the purpose of usefulness. In fact, usefulness serves as both the culmination of her spiritual journey and the justification for her participation in the newly sprouted American missionary movement. This is made abundantly clear in a letter written in May 1811.¹²⁸ In it, Harriet questions whether she would ever experience God’s blessings or a peaceful conscience should she refuse her “little aid” to the cause.¹²⁹ Again in the light of eternity, and her short time on earth, the trials of India pale in comparison to the work to do and Harriet trusts that God will use her during her time on earth, whatever length it may be. She writes, “I trust that he will make his promise good, that as my day is, so shall my strength be.”¹³⁰

Harriet’s decision for usefulness is not an individualized decision, however – her community shares the language and encourages the seeking of usefulness by young

¹²⁶ Woods, *A Sermon*, 76.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

women. It is only because those in Harriet's community had decided women could be useful, that she takes the proposal seriously. She writes:

*All my friends with whom I have conversed since my return to Haverhill, advise me to go. Some Christians who were formerly opposed, after obtaining a more extensive knowledge of the subject, think females, would be useful. The people of this world probably view this subject as they do others. Those who have never felt the worth of their own souls, account it superstition and hypocritic zeal, for Christians to sacrifice their earthly pleasures, for the sake of telling the heathen world of a Saviour. But all the ridicule that the gay and thoughtless sinner can invent, will not essentially injure me. If I am actuated by love to the Saviour and his cause, nothing in earth or hell can hurt me.*¹³¹

In closing the letter, Harriet requests that her correspondent meet her at the throne of grace in prayer, uniting their hearts spiritually and through pen and ink.¹³² In particular, she asks that God would make her humble and would glorify himself through her life – a comprehensive definition of usefulness.¹³³

Harriet's decision is not met entirely with communal approval, however. Though those most important for the decision support her, she is faced with significant criticism. Describing the charges made against her, Harriet lists accusations which would have been very serious to level against a modestly pious evangelical woman, "Even while blest with an habitation in my own country, I hear some of those friends, whom I fondly love accusing me of the love of novelty, of an invincible attachment to a fellow creature, of superstition and of wanting a great name."¹³⁴ Her motivations and the accusations of those who fail to understand them become a significant issue for Harriet to address within her own heart, and Harriet herself at times doubts her reasons for going.¹³⁵ She writes, "This day has been spent in melancholy dejection and sorrow of heart. The trials of a

¹³¹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 76-77.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

missionary life, united with my entire unfitness for the undertaking, and the fear of being under the influence of improper motives, have produced distress.”¹³⁶ She speaks of herself as weak and unqualified and is distressed by the lack of evidence of her prior usefulness in her own country.¹³⁷ Without anything to show her usefulness since her conversion, how can she be assured of usefulness for her future work among the heathen? Once again Harriet resorts to her frequently used language of “stupidity,” writing, “Weep, Oh my soul, for the forlorn heathen. – Be astonished at the stupidity of Christians – be astonished at *thine own*.”¹³⁸

Harriet ultimately finds peace in the matter by remembering God’s knowledge of her heart. Though she may question herself along with the doubts of others, Harriet is consoled by the knowledge that God understands her motives and can accept them. She writes:

My companions are perhaps accusing me of superstition and the love of novelty. But God alone knows the motives by which I am actuated, and he alone will be my final Judge. Let me but form such a decision as he will approve, and I ask no more. Willingly will I let go my eager grasp of the things of time and sense, and flee to Jesus. Oh that he would prepare me for the future events of life, and glorify himself in the disposal of my concerns.¹³⁹

Harriet’s usefulness may be in doubt, but her desire to be useful is not, and this will be accepted by God. Even if she fails, the desire for usefulness signifies spiritual fruit. She writes, “I have this consolation, if the motives by which I am actuated are sincere and good, God will accept the inclination to glorify him, even though I should not be made useful.”¹⁴⁰ Her hope is that God will honor her motivations and bless her longing to be

¹³⁶ Woods, *A Sermon*, 95.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 83, 84.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 91.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

“...swallowed up in endless fruition!”¹⁴¹ Because her motivations are pure, Harriet is able to sacrifice all, naming the many things she would willingly give up in serve of God: “the dearest earthly friend,” mother and siblings, her native home, civilized and pious companions, and a Christian burial.¹⁴²

Shortly before her departure, Harriet’s language concerning usefulness increases in specificity. Quite different from her early, broadly general search for usefulness, Harriet now communicates certain tasks by which she and her companions can and should be used. In a letter to one friend, Harriet rhetorically asks if they as American women have any benevolence. If yes, and they value the salvation the savior offers them, then they are obliged to either go to the heathen themselves, or at the least, expend great effort in prayer for the heathen. Additionally, “...by our vigorous exertions we can awaken a missionary spirit in others, and excite them also to feel for those who are perishing in pagan darkness.”¹⁴³ Harriet’s idea of what usefulness looks like also become more specific concerning her work in India. By the time of her departure, she speaks specifically of her work to raise Hindu women out of their degradation, writing:

I have attempted this morning, to bring India, with the parting scenes between, near at hand. Surely, nothing but the sovereign power of God could have led me to contemplate, with serenity and composure, the painful scene of a missionary life; and nothing but his grace will support me, when farewells are surrounding me. Oh, how can I *think* of that hour! – But it is a glorious work, for which, I am making these great sacrifices: – it is nothing less than to assist in spreading the triumphs of the cross, in foreign lands. Oh, could I become the instrument of bringing one degraded *female* to Jesus, how should I be repaid for *every tear*, and *every pain*! To make a female Indian acquainted with the way of life, Oh what a blessing! – my soul exults at the thought!¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Woods, *A Sermon*, 86.

¹⁴² Ibid., 82, 81, 91, 93-94, 101.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 92.

As Harriet's ideas about and commitment to usefulness reach their climax in her marriage to a missionary and subsequent departure for India, she most clearly articulates the connections she draws between conversion, usefulness, eternity, and the encroaching millennium. In one of her final letters to a faithful correspondent, Harriet supplicates her friend to at last be converted before her departure. She communicates that it would be one final source of joy and comfort before embarking upon the challenges of a missionary life to know that her friend has at last accepted true religion. The reason she gives for this great desire is so that she might be at peace knowing a useful friend had been left behind at home. Harriet writes:

How would it gladden my sad heart, in the trying hour of my departure, could I but leave a dear circle of females of my own age, engaged for God, and eminent for their usefulness in Haverhill. Well; I hope to find a circle of Hindoo sisters in India, interested in *that* religion which many of my companions reject, though blest with innumerable privileges. But my friend M. will not treat with indifference *this* religion. Oh no: I will cherish the fond hope, that she will renounce the world, become a follower of Immanuel, and be unwearied in her exertions to spread the triumphs of the cross through the world.¹⁴⁵

In this passage, Harriet clearly equates her friend's potential conversion with the eventual spiritual fruit of usefulness. For Harriet, usefulness must be the final goal and aim of conversion.

As the millennium approaches and Harriet again considers the nature of eternity, her passion for usefulness is fully articulated. In a journal entry, Harriet speaks of her ultimate heavenly purpose:

What word can by more impressive and weighty than ETERNITY? How replete with events, that deeply interest every intelligent creature! How full of ideas, too big for utterance! And can ETERNITY be *mine*? If the word of Jehovah be true, I shall surely inhabit *Eternity*, when this short life is ended. Yes; I feel that I have an immortal part, which will continue the same, when time and nature fail. And shall it exist in glory? Oh, let me fly to Jesus, and make his arms my resting place.

¹⁴⁵ Woods, *A Sermon*, 93-94.

Then shall I rest securely, when the heavens are rolled together as a scroll, and the elements melt with fervent heat.¹⁴⁶

Yet as eternity draws close to temporal reality in the arrival of the millennium, usefulness becomes more and more important for earthly existence.¹⁴⁷ As the “glorious morn of the Millennium hastens,” Harriet does not believe God’s children have been tasked with idleness, but rather with work for the glory of God.¹⁴⁸ Her greatest desire for herself and her companions is to “be made eminently holy and useful.”¹⁴⁹ Referencing the millennium, Harriet speaks of the world at hand:

Shall we, my ever dear M., who fondly hope that we are the lambs of Jesus’ flock, be content to live indolent, inactive lives, and not assist in the great revolution about to be effected in this world of sin? Oh no; we will not let it be said, at the great day, that one soul for whom the Son of God became incarnate, for whom he groaned away a dying life, has perished through our neglect. Let worldly ease be sacrificed; let a life of self-denial and hardships be welcome to us, if the cause of God may thereby be most promoted, and sinners most likely to be saved from destruction.¹⁵⁰

For those converted in the dawn of the millennium, usefulness is the necessary outcome of conversion.

In Harriet Newell’s memoir, the case for female participation in the American missionary endeavor was strongly articulated through the idea of usefulness. Because of its imprecise yet richly theological meaning, usefulness was a powerful concept for women to apply the Christian message to their particular contexts and participate in what was viewed by many as a risky and unfeminine endeavor. Harriet’s language of usefulness directly connected her conversion to her desire to serve with the missionaries, extending the upward slope of the traditional U-shaped narrative into acts of service for

¹⁴⁶ Woods, *A Sermon*, 90.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 100, 103.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

God. Yet it did not overtly challenge common gender norms – the language of usefulness could be understood to apply to the particular realities of the female experience in antebellum America without suggesting that women necessarily had to alter their gender roles. Harriet's search for usefulness was a strictly feminine search and her decision to live out her usefulness through the missionary cause utilized the gendered language surrounding marriage and family common for her time. Usefulness was such powerful language in Harriet's pen because it expanded the world in which she participated while holding onto the particularly gendered context in which she lived. In using this language and in the ABCFM's decision to widely publicize it, Harriet Newell's life and death became a major catalyst for women to follow in her footsteps.

Chapter Four: The Pedagogical Purpose and Establishment of the Missionary Wife Memoir Genre

A little more than a decade after the successful publication of Harriet Newell's memoir, the creation of the missionary wife memoir genre began. From the mid 1820s until the Civil War, dozens of memoirs dedicated to the memories of departed missionary wives were published. In all of these works, the women who sacrificed their lives to the American missionary cause were remembered as exemplars of evangelical womanhood, noted primarily for their usefulness and piety. Officially, those who authored the memoirs were ordained men, usually ministers familiar with the woman and family. Occasionally the husband of the deceased chose to write himself. These editors mostly sought to utilize the missionary wife's own writings as much as possible, echoing Harriet Newell's memoir, the genre's original text; however, when the source material was not available, the editors freely interjected their own narration.

Interestingly, whether utilizing the subject's diaries and correspondence or relying upon his own narration, these editors were largely faithful to the literary pattern of Leonard Woods's work honoring Harriet Newell. As the four examples included here demonstrate, all four editors maintained the classic conversion narrative and its U-shape, relying upon its foundation to lead into discussion of the subject's usefulness. Significant differences can be noticed between the women – two belonged to the ABCFM and two were Baptists, and personalities varied wildly as some exhibited sharp minds and quick wits, while others were more committed to quiet piety. Nonetheless, the similarities are striking. All of the works studied here reveal women deeply impacted by ideas of benevolence, the millennium, and eternity. All took seriously the call to usefulness their

conversions required, making great efforts to demonstrate their service to God before departing for the mission field. And all were highly active in the evangelical textual community, noting the spiritual impact and significance of their reading and writing. In particular, the later three, Allen, Winslow, and Jones, write of the significant impact Harriet Newell's memoir had on their lives and decisions, demonstrating exactly the pedagogical impact evangelical publishers hoped their work would have on American society. By studying these memoirs, we find demonstrated the contextualization of the conversion narrative into the antebellum woman's sphere as women sought usefulness according to the textual community which they engaged.

A. Ann Judson

One of America's most famous missionaries, Ann Judson sailed for the mission field as a member of the same initial party with Harriet Newell. Instrumental in launching the American missionary movement and the ABCFM, Ann's husband, Adoniram, is well remembered for changing his theological convictions while on the long journey to India. Upon arriving, both Judsons were rebaptized and communicated their new commitments back to the ABCFM.¹ After parting ways with the Newells, the Judsons found themselves in Burma and their mission was closely followed through its many trials by a breathless American public. Through her abundant correspondence with those back home and its frequent publication in evangelical periodicals, Ann quickly became as iconic a heroine as Harriet Newell. By the time of her death in 1826, Ann's fourteen years on the mission

¹ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson, The Dramatic Events of the First American Foreign Mission, and the Course of Evangelical Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 2-3.

field were considered an inspiring proof of the usefulness of women for the missionary cause, whether Baptist or Congregational.²

Ann's memoir was the second major publication in honor of a missionary wife after Harriet Newell's memoir. It was not released until 1829 and the author, Boston minister James D. Knowles, apologized profusely to his readers for the length of time required to compile it. As he states, anyone who had already heard of Ann Judson did not need a reason to anticipate her memoir; all who were familiar with her life eagerly wished to learn more about it.³ The challenge Knowles faced was practical – Ann had destroyed most of her journals and letters during a politically sensitive period for the mission and what few Adoniram located had to travel the long distance back to America.⁴ Similar to Harriet Newell's memoir, Knowles expressly desired to keep as much of it as possible in Ann's own voice; yet, as with Harriet Newell's memoir the reduced material from which to work passed through both her husband and her memorialist's editing, leaving us with a highly filtered understanding of the subject.⁵ As with all of the memoirs, the reason for its publication is abundantly clear – Knowles seeks to inspire and encourage others into missionary service through the remarkable and exemplary life of Ann Judson.⁶

Like Harriet's memoir, Ann's conversion narrative is given prominence as the foundation upon which the rest of the narrative relies. Knowles recognizes Ann for her native energy, purpose, and intellect; however, he states that her moral character is more

² Brumberg, *Mission for Life*, 13-19.

³ James D. Knowles, *Memoir of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah. Including a History of the American Baptist Mission in the Burman Empire* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmans, 1829), 10, Archive.org, accessed 23 February 2017.

⁴ Ibid., iii.

⁵ Ibid., iv.

⁶ Ibid., iv-v, 9-10, 26.

important than even her natural gifts for understanding her life and usefulness.⁷ He writes, “Her religious character, however, is of the most importance, in itself, and in connection with her future life. The readers of this Memoir will feel the deepest concern, to trace the rise and progress of that spiritual renovation, and that divine teaching, which made her a disciple of the Saviour, and prepared her for her labors in his service.”⁸

Ann’s conversion narrative closely follows the U-shape pattern and bears many similarities to Harriet Newell’s. She writes that she was taught to be generally virtuous by her mother and believed that she should be a generally good child in order to avoid hell.⁹ With this general reliance on her good works, Ann was spiritually unaware with no religious impressions until she was sixteen years old, at which point she started to attend Bradford Academy.¹⁰ While in attendance, Ann happily gave in to many temptations and indulged in many frivolous activities.¹¹ Her first awakening came when she happened to read a portion of Hannah Moore’s *Strictures on Female Education* and later *Pilgrim’s Progress*, marking only the beginning of the crucial role reading continued to have for Ann’s religious experiences.¹² After these initial impressions, Ann made a resolution to become religiously serious; however, within day she fails to hold to her resolution and gave up her piety altogether.¹³

⁷ Knowles, *Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 10-12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13, 20, 29, 31. Ann was a voracious reader and studied many major theological and religious works, including: the works of Hannah More, Joseph Bellamy, Phillip Doddridge, Samuel Hopkins, and Jonathan Edwards; *The Life of David Brainerd*; commentaries from “Guise, Orton, and Scott;” *Sketches of the Life of the Late Rev. Samuel Hopkins*, *The Life and Character of Miss Susanna Anthony*. A friend stated about Ann: “When reading Scripture, sermons, or other works, if she met with any sentiment or doctrine, which seemed dark and intricate, she would mark it, and beg the first clergyman, who called at her father’s, to elucidate and explain it.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

Some months later, Ann began to attend a number of religious conferences held in Bradford and recounts being deeply touched by them.¹⁴ During this time she wept, lost her interest in amusements, and felt melancholy and dejected.¹⁵ Upon a visit to an aunt, who was also under religious impressions, Ann became convicted of her need to let the world know she acknowledged herself a sinner and decided to forgo amusing company in order to address the needs of her soul by confining herself to her bedchamber.¹⁶ Unsure of how to deal with her soul, however, Ann found herself lost spiritually and asked her preceptor at Bradford for guidance. He encouraged her to pray for mercy and submit herself to God, supplying her with religious magazines from which to learn.¹⁷ At this point, Ann recounts attempting to follow his advice, but faces a new obstacle – her own heart. Not yet able to surrender herself completely, Ann became impatient and angry with God for not noticing her repentance more quickly and decided that she cannot stand a sovereign God who has the right to choose and reject people. She writes:

After spending two or three weeks in this manner, without obtaining the least comfort, my heart began to rise in rebellion against God. I thought it unjust in him, not to notice my prayers and my repentance. I could not endure the thought, that he was a sovereign God, and had a right to call one and leave another to perish. So far from being merciful in calling some, I thought it cruel in him to send any of his creatures to hell for their disobedience. But my chief distress was occasioned by a view of his perfect purity and holiness. My heart was filled with aversion and hatred towards a *holy* God; and I felt, that if admitted into heaven, with the feelings I then had, I should be as miserable as I could be in hell. In this state, I longed for annihilation; and if I could have destroyed the existence of my soul, with as much ease as that of my body, I should quickly have done it.¹⁸

¹⁴ Knowles, *Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

Eventually, Ann begins to find beauty in God's plan of salvation and she commits her soul to God. Still awaiting a new heart, she continues with her religious reading and finally discovers the answers she needs for understanding God's character. She writes:

A few days after this, as I was reading Bellamy's True Religion, I obtained a new view of the character of God. His justice, displayed in condemning the finally impenitent, which I had before viewed as cruel, now appeared to be an expression of hatred to sin, and regard to the good of beings in general. A view of his purity and holiness filled my soul with wonder and admiration. I felt a disposition to commit myself unreservedly into his hands, and leave it with him to save me or cast me off, for I felt I could not be unhappy, while allowed the privilege of contemplating and loving so glorious a Being.¹⁹

From this acceptance of God's sovereignty, Ann finally experiences the complete surrender a true acknowledgement of sin requires. Ann states that her contemplations of God's character "humbled me in the dust" and "melted me into sorrow and contrition for my sins."²⁰ At the lowest point of the U-shaped conversion experience, Ann can only plead Christ's merit alone.²¹

As Ann's conversion narrative starts along its upward slope, she makes a quick association between conversion and usefulness. Seeking the good of others becomes the immediate outcome of Ann's conversion as she longs to see others converted. She writes, "My chief happiness now consisted in contemplating the moral perfections of the glorious God. I longed, to have intelligent creatures love him; and felt, that even fallen spirits could never be released from their obligations to love a Being possessed of such glorious perfections."²² The result is that Ann returns to school with new purpose and motivation – the desire "to improve all I had to the glory of God."²³ She closes her

¹⁹ Knowles, *Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 17-18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

conversion narrative by noting her desire to learn in order to benefit others, writing, “I, therefore, diligently employed all my hours in school, in acquiring useful knowledge, and spent my evenings and part of the night in spiritual enjoyments.”²⁴

Whether addressing needs at home or on the mission field, Ann believes usefulness is the clear outcome of her new spiritual reality.²⁵ For evidence of the Christian’s growth in grace, Ann insists she must first see more and more of her heart’s wickedness, know more about Jesus and her need of him, and become more anxious for the souls of others, feeling anxious to do all in her power to save sinners. The growing Christian will “pray more often, earnestly and fervently,” and exhibit “a disrelish for the vanities of the world, and a sincere and hearty desire to devote all they have to him, and serve him entirely.”²⁶ The Christian will watch herself in everything she does, looking for these evidences of growth.²⁷ Reflecting back on the new motivation in school that her conversion created, Ann provides concrete evidence of her growth in grace. She writes:

Have taken charge of a few scholars. Ever since I have had a comfortable hope in Christ, I have desired to devote myself to him, in such a way, as to be useful to my fellow creatures. As Providence has placed me in a situation of life, where I have an opportunity of getting as good an education as I desire, I feel it would be highly criminal in me not to improve it. I feel, also, that it would be equally criminal to desire to be well educated and accomplished, from selfish motives, with a view merely to gratify my taste and relish for improvement, or my pride in being qualified to shine. I therefore resolved last winter, to attend the academy, from no other motive, than to improve the talents bestowed by God, so as to be more extensively devoted to his glory, and the benefit of my fellow creatures. On being lately requested to take a small school, for a few months, I felt very unqualified to have the charge of little immortal souls; but the hope of doing them good, by endeavoring to impress their young and tender minds with divine truth, and the obligation I feel, *to try to be useful*, have induced me to comply.²⁸

²⁴ Knowles, *Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22, 24, 25, 27.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

Similar to Harriet Newell, Ann's conceptualization of usefulness is understood in the light of eternity; yet, Ann further develops her ideas of usefulness in the light of God's character. Like Harriet, Ann knows that it does not matter whether God calls her to be useful in America or among the heathen because she will spend eternity elsewhere.²⁹ In a reflection upon her love of God and her desire for him to put her where she can be most useful, Ann ties together the call to improve time with the call of eternity, writing, "Time appears nothing when compared with eternity, and yet events the most momentous depend on the improvement of these fleeting years. O Jesus, direct me, and I am safe; use me in thy service, and I ask no more. I would not choose my position of work or place of labor; only let me know thy will, and I will readily comply."³⁰ In Ann's writing on usefulness, she clearly articulates that the closer she draws to God and the more she knows Jesus, the more useful she expects to become. She writes:

When I get near to God, and discern the excellence of the character of the Lord Jesus, and especially his power and willingness to save, I feel desirous that the whole world should become acquainted with this Saviour. I am not only willing to spend my days among the heathen, in attempting to enlighten and save them, but I find much pleasure in the prospect. Yes, I am quite willing to give up temporal comforts, and live a life of hardship and trial, if it be the will of God.³¹

And:

I have strong hope, that in giving me such an opportunity of laboring for him, he will make me peculiarly useful. No matter where I am, if I do but serve the infinitely blessed God; and it is my comfort, that he can prepare to me serve him. Blessed Jesus, I am thine forever. Do with me what thou wilt; lead me in the path in which thou wouldst have me go, and it is enough.³²

For Ann, the eternity that inspires and compels her usefulness is not a vague concept, but rather an intimate and growing knowledge of her savior.

²⁹ Knowles, *Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 39.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³² *Ibid.*

Compared to Harriet Newell's memoir, Knowles's voice is significantly more present, expositing on numerous topics connected to the narrative; of particular note, however, is Knowles's acknowledgment of Harriet Newell as the "proto-martyr" in the light of whose death the missionary wives were understood.³³ Even though Ann herself became one of the most iconic symbols of American missions, lauded by Knowles as the first to commit to the cause, early America understood Harriet Newell to be the first exemplar after which women should pattern their usefulness.³⁴ The work missionary wives conducted on the field was of importance, but as Harriet's shortened tenure demonstrated, understandings of usefulness were fundamentally rooted in the decision to go, offering one's life as a sacrifice to the cause. Of course, the missionary wives hoped and expected to do more than Harriet Newell had been able to do. Yet, through the honor her short life garnered, they were reminded that their usefulness was not defined by their productivity. As Ann writes, "Might I but be the means of converting a single soul, it would be worth spending all my days to accomplish. Yes, I feel willing to be placed in the situation, in which I can do most good, *though it were to carry the Gospel to the distant, benighted heathen.*"³⁵ Very little about a woman's usefulness on the field was strongly defined; rather, the hope and goal of being useful was internally motivated and spiritually understood. As Ann describes in a final passage before her departure, usefulness was at its core a disposition of the heart to do whatever work the Lord might give, reflecting the surrender of Mary. She writes:

Felt an ardent desire to be instrumental of spreading the knowledge of the Redeemer's name, in a heathen land. Felt it a great, an undeserved privilege, to have an opportunity of going. Yes, I think I would rather go to India, among the

³³ Knowles, *Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

heathen, notwithstanding the almost insurmountable difficulties in the way, than to stay at home and enjoy the comforts and luxuries of life. Faith in Christ will enable me to bear trials, however severe. My hope in his powerful protection animates me to persevere in my purpose. O, if he will condescend to make me useful in promoting his kingdom, I care not where I perform his work, nor how hard it be. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*"³⁶

Harriet Newell and Ann Judson's lives as missionary wives could not have been more different – Harriet died quickly before any of her labors were even started, whereas Ann was legendary in her herculean efforts during her fourteen years on the field. Yet in his editing and commentary, Knowles makes it clear that what united the experiences of these two first missionary wives was not what they accomplished, but the desire for usefulness that first compelled them to depart for heathen lands.

B. Myra W. Allen

Myra Allen and her new husband departed from Boston with the ABCFM for India in 1827. Within four years, she had died in childbirth and her journals and letters were returned to the United States for publication in 1832 under the oversight of Cyrus Mann, the minister of her home congregation in Westminister, Massachusetts.³⁷ As with the memoir of Harriet Newell, Mann acted as the male interlocutor in order to ensure the propriety of publishing a female subject's writing; however, whereas Leonard Woods had kept his authorial interjections to a strict minimum, Mann's voice is noticeably more present throughout the narrative, providing structure, overview, and defense. Mann makes it very clear that the purpose of Allen's memoir is its pedagogical power for

³⁶ Knowles, *Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 40-41.

³⁷ Cyrus Mann, *Memoir of Mrs. Myra W. Allen, Who Died at the Missionary Station of the American Board in Bombay, on the 5th of February, 1831, in the 30th Year of Her Age* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1834), 243-244, Archive.org, accessed 11 March 2016.

conversion and commitment to the missionary cause.³⁸ He writes that Allen's piety and usefulness make her a powerful exemplar, and as such, "It is consequently much to be desired, that the emotions which have been excited should receive holy impression: and that those lessons which may be learned from her life and character should be solemnly weighted, when the mind is in the most favorable situation for considering them."³⁹

As with the preceding memoirs of missionary wives, Mann locates Myra's conversion narrative at the beginning of the narrative in order to lay the foundation for her voice and experience, which then extends into a narrative of usefulness. The shape and events of Myra's conversion are remarkably similar to those of Harriet's. She starts her narrative in a spiritual stasis, uninterested in serious religion despite the piousness of her family and her knowledge of the "truths of religion."⁴⁰ At seventeen years old, when her companions start to receive religious impressions, Myra starts to reflect upon the darkness of her spiritual state and experiences an initial awakening; yet, she knows that her heart continues to desire to do the work of salvation on its own, without reliance on God's grace.⁴¹ As a result she suffers from multiple years of spiritual despondency and depression before her final conversion takes place.⁴²

While she is away from home attending academy, Myra observes an awakening and is deeply impressed by an accompanying sermon.⁴³ Contemplating the state of her soul, she writes, "I was ready to acknowledge every charge brought against me in the Scriptures – for I felt its truth; I felt mine to be a peculiar case, and that I was much

³⁸ Mann, *Mrs. Myra W. Allen*, 1-2, 24, 89.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

beneath the notice of all, but especially Christians. The promises seemed for others, but not to reach me.”⁴⁴ Myra goes forward for special prayer after the conclusion of the sermon and weeps with the preacher; however, she still does not find spiritual relief.⁴⁵ Upon returning home, Myra devotes many months to meditating on scripture and finally experiences the peace and assurance which signal conversion.⁴⁶ Myra writes of the experience:

I heard a discourse by our pastor, from the words, ‘We know in part,’ which greatly relieved my mind. He showed that, as there are mysteries in the natural world, which he particularly noticed, so we must expect to find them in the spiritual; and that creatures, of so limited capacities and darkened understandings, have no right to inquire into the ‘secrets of the Lord,’ nor strive to be ‘wise above what is written.’ I saw my error, and my mind was liberated. A tranquil serenity now took possession of my breast, such as had long been a stranger there. The plan of salvation opened to my view in a lovely, engaging light, and I felt that there was safety in committing myself wholly to sovereign mercy; if left to perish, no injustice would be done; yet I fully believed that none who did trust in the Saviour unreservedly, would be cast off.⁴⁷

Shortly thereafter, Myra joins her local church at the age of twenty-two.⁴⁸

Strong similarities with Harriet Newell are identifiable throughout Myra’s writing, particularly concerning her spiritual reasoning. Consideration and language of the religious affections is common throughout Myra’s thinking, even before her conversion, and she understands them to be the undergirding for all spiritual action – whether rebellion or submission.⁴⁹ It is from the affections renewed by salvation that the disposition toward benevolence grows in the Christian’s life. Myra writes, “Religion with its duties and prospects is not calculated to fill the mind with gloom and despondency.

⁴⁴ Mann, *Mrs. Myra W. Allen*, 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10, 68, 83-84.

Far otherwise, it expands and ennobles the faculties, it tends to regulate, refine and purify the affections, restrain the passions, and promote a spirit of benevolence to man, and resignation to God.”⁵⁰ Because benevolence leads the Christian into usefulness, Myra frequently ties together concepts of conversion and usefulness, particularly when understood in the light of eternity. In a letter to an unconverted friend, she writes:

How important that we live in constant readiness for death. What do we lose, if we come short of Heaven! ‘What shall it profit, should we gain the whole world, and *lose our own souls!*’ What satisfaction can a reconciliation of the honors and pleasures of the world afford in the dreary mansions of woe? Oh! they would but augment the gnawings of ‘the worm that never dies.’ But how joyful in the regions of bliss must be the recollection of opportunities for usefulness faithfully improved. Let such considerations animate us to diligence in securing our salvation, and in striving to promote the spiritual interests of those around us.⁵¹

As a spiritual fruit growing from the vine of Christian conversion, usefulness is something a woman should seek after in order to improve upon the short time given her by eternity.

Unlike Harriet Newell, for whom usefulness remained elusive until given the opportunity to leave for the mission field, Myra demonstrated abundant usefulness before her departure, providing Mann with no lack of examples with which to demonstrate the exemplariness of her Christian life. Allen was actively involved in raising money for missions, caring for the poor, teaching Sunday school, and prayer meetings.⁵² Furthermore, she influenced a good many conversions among her personal acquaintances, the children of her neighborhood, and even strangers.⁵³

Another marked difference with Harriet Newell’s memoir is the degree to which Myra has contact with the missionary endeavor before her own commitment to it; her

⁵⁰ Mann, *Mrs. Myra W. Allen*, 64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 63. Other examples of such connections can be found on 43, 65-66, 76-79, 83-84.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 22-23, 30, 39, 76.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 28-29, 41-44, 46, 59ff, 74ff, 88-91.

memoir demonstrates evidence of an increased social presence and awareness of the movement. For example, Myra writes of an acquaintance becomes a missionary before herself and corresponds with a brother about his visit to a Native American mission.⁵⁴ Myra mentions reading the work of Catherine Brown, a Native American convert who was active in promoting benevolent Christianity among her people, along with other books on the topic of missions.⁵⁵ Of particular interest to this study, Myra specifically mentions reading Harriet Newell's memoir in her conversion account. Reading it in the year of its publication at the age of thirteen, Myra credits the memoir with giving her great religious impressions, though not necessarily with a desire to participate in the missionary cause.⁵⁶ Perhaps one of the subtler illustrations of the dissemination of the missionary effort within Myra's context is Mann's description of her parting words with the people of her town. Describing her speaking as one who knows she is dying, Mann alludes to the life expectancy of those on the mission field, particularly women, indicating that Myra was not unaware of that to which she went.⁵⁷

Throughout the memoir, Mann is very concerned with defending the private nature of Myra's writing prior to their publication, evidencing a greater awareness of the private/public issues surrounding women writers.⁵⁸ Not only does he insist that the diary and letters were written for strictly private purposes and were only published due to the exemplariness of the subject, but he goes even further to make sure his readers understand that Myra did not consider the missionary endeavor for herself until she

⁵⁴ Mann, *Mrs. Myra W. Allen*, 79-80.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-45, 54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 33.

received her marriage proposal.⁵⁹ Due to the public nature of the cause, Mann does not consider missions something a pious woman would consider herself without the initiation of a man.

Because the endeavor required women to operate in a sphere considered uncomfortable, if not inappropriate, for evangelical women who demonstrated submissive piety, usefulness sprouting from conversion is clearly called upon by both Myra and her male interlocutor as the explanation for her participation. By connecting usefulness to conversion, the Christian message of salvation took on a powerful new meaning within the female context of antebellum New England. As Myra eloquently writes in a letter to a friend:

Oh my dear sister, it is vastly important that we fill our stations with usefulness. How heart-rending will be the reflection in the dying hour, and in eternity, that we have buried our talent in the earth. The precious *now* that flies is the time to prevent this unhappy issue of things. Let us think of the inexpressible music of that plaudit from our Judge, '*Well done,*' &c. ... Let us mutually wrestle at the throne of mercy for a spirit of prayer to pervade our own hearts, and those of every member of this church. O for that benevolence which has been represented as so necessary to christian experience; that tenderness of compassion for sinners, which shall lead us to weep in secret places for them with anguish of spirit. Then shall we be prepared to speak to them on the subject of their salvation.⁶⁰

Conversion was the securest foundation upon which the argument for female participation in missions could lay, and through the use of the U-shape narrative, Myra's memoir built upon it securely the idea that women could be useful for the propagation of the Christian faith.

C. *Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*

Harriet Lathrop married Miron Winslow in 1819 and shortly thereafter they sailed together for missionary service in India with the ABCFM. Though Harriet Winslow had

⁵⁹ Mann, *Mrs. Myra W. Allen*, 23, 48, 53.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-84.

experienced significant ill health throughout her adolescence and young adulthood, remarkably, she served on the field for fourteen years before her unexpected death.⁶¹ Two years after her death, her husband compiled her journals and letters and authored a memoir in her honor. Similar to the memoirs of Harriet Newell and Myra Allen, Winslow wrote to inspire American readers to commit to the missionary cause. His hope was that by authoring the memoir himself, and thus providing both an intimate glimpse into the reality of missions and a more cohesive narrative, his wife's voice might challenge some of the false ideas about the work of missions and promote a strong argument for its necessity.⁶²

Harriet Winslow experienced awakening and conversion at an unusually early age and her youthfulness figures prominently in her narrative. Born in 1796, Harriet was raised in a happy family and put into school early.⁶³ Though her parents had not yet joined the church, they were pious and participated in the many religious meetings which took place in their local town.⁶⁴ When she was twelve years old, Harriet's mother frequently took her to the town's religious meetings, and it was through such meetings that Harriet describes coming to an awareness of her sinfulness, particularly her disobedience and temper, in her conversion narrative.⁶⁵ As with Harriet Newell and Myra Allen, this initial awakening sparks an attempt by Harriet Winslow to improve herself as she resolves to become a better person.⁶⁶ She reads the many religious books her mother gives her and makes spiritual resolutions accordingly, writing, "My mother often put into

⁶¹ Miron Winslow, *A Memoir of Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow, Combining a Sketch of the Ceylon Mission* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 387-391, Archive.org, accessed 29 September 2015.

⁶² Ibid., 3-6.

⁶³ Ibid., 10-11.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11ff.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 11-12

my hands such books as she thought might do me good, and about this time gave me Hawes' directions for obtaining the new birth. I examined them, and determined strictly to observe every thing which he recommends. Several times I read them over, yet seemed to gain nothing."⁶⁷ However, it does not take long for Harriet to realize she cannot improve herself. She writes, "It then occurred to me that I could not make myself better; so I went to God; and whenever I looked at my rule of duty, prayed that He would constrain me to observe it, and do all that was required. I daily meditated over this book, likewise reading the Bible, and retiring apart to pray. I found my heart beginning to soften, while my numerous offences filled me with confusion."⁶⁸

As Harriet continues along the path of conversion, she recounts the opposition she faced for it. Her young friends began to shun her for her love of spending time with pious older women who teach her the truths of religion. Despite her friends' rejection though, Harriet continues to attend the religious meetings of the adults and often weeps with an older friend who speaks to her of scripture.⁶⁹ Yet Harriet is very clear that she still did not feel a full conviction of sin, continuing instead to try to improve herself.

It is not until Harriet encounters Isaiah 55 at a religious meeting that she realizes God's goodness and grace to sinners, feels her need of a savior, and weeps with her mother over her sin.⁷⁰ Describing the spiritual helplessness of the bottom of the U-shape, Harriet writes:

My dear mother inquired why I was weeping so bitterly. I replied that I was a great sinner, and this evening felt more than I ever did before that I was wretched and must perish forever. I said but little, and she left me after saying only a few words. My anxiety increased. I felt willing I thought to do any thing, to be any

⁶⁷ Winslow, *Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*, 12.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 13

thing, if the Lord would receive me as his child. I seemed to expect some special revelation from Him of my adoption, and often prayed that some angel might come and give me the so much desired assurance. I did not find myself amended of my faults. I only saw and felt them more, and knew that God must interpose and change my heart entirely, or I should continue to grow worse and worse. According to the advice of Doddridge and Hawes, I privately dedicated myself to God, in a written form, resolving to be his alone, and his forever. I seemed to receive a blessing in this act, and was greatly encouraged to persevere, and not to cease striving until I obtained.⁷¹

After reaching this spiritual bottom, Harriet does not know how to move forward and struggles to persevere to obtain salvation. She increases her commitment to praying twice daily to praying four times a day and seeks to have no guide but the Holy Spirit and Bible.⁷² At thirteen years old, Harriet receives a letter from a friend who has also become awakened and she delights in finding a new spiritual companion with whom she can start religious correspondence.⁷³ A short while later, while in a time of prayer, Harriet finally receives the assurance of salvation she has been seeking. She writes, “A sweet peace was shed abroad in my soul. I felt assured that the Lord had heard my cry, and had not despised my prayer.”⁷⁴ With the new spiritual confidence which filled her heart, Harriet joined her local church in 1809, along with her parents and a household servant.⁷⁵

Both Harriet and Winslow use the language of usefulness abundantly and draw strong connections between Harriet’s conversion and her resulting usefulness. After her conversion, she writes, “Remaining corruption within me causes me to cry aloud for help. I feel that I have gone astray, have wandered, and loved to wander. It grieves me, Oh my God, I ask of thee strength. I ask for that divine love which will make me count all things but loss that I may win Christ. I beseech thee let me not live for myself alone. Enable me

⁷¹ Winslow, *Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*, 13-14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

to be useful to all around me.”⁷⁶ From this point on, usefulness is a constant term in her language, contrasting it with stupidity in her frequent thoughts on the Christian’s duty to fully exert herself in service to God.⁷⁷ In a passage directly connecting her conversion with her usefulness, Harriet renews the promises she made in her conversion with the prayerful request that she be able to use her abilities for service to God and for others. She writes:

I ardently desire to devote my life to the service of my Maker; to be constantly mindful of my responsibility; to feel that I must live for others, and not for myself. Yesterday I renewed my solemn dedication of myself to the Lord, promising with his assistance to devote my time, the faculties of my mind, the members of my body, my talents, and my influence over others; all to the Maker and Giver of every power. Oh Heavenly Father, accept of me, and let me not again return to the vanities of life, with the avidity which I have done heretofore.⁷⁸

Harriet Winslow seems to have been a highly active woman and in contrast to Harriet Newell and Myra Allen, who filled much of their journals and letters with extensive theological reflections, she speaks mostly of the many endeavors she undertook to implement her usefulness. Harriet Winslow was influential in starting numerous benevolent endeavors before her departure overseas, including a Sunday school and a ladies’ prayer and benevolent society.⁷⁹ She worked arduously for the conversions of her friends and at collecting relief money for the poor, and she frequently writes of and prays for the heathen.⁸⁰ Considerations of eternity are far less prominent in Harriet’s writing; instead, she focuses on the needs of the poor, the unconverted, and the heathen, early impressed by their needs for her motivation.

⁷⁶ Winslow, *Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*, 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-27, 29, 39-40, 46-47, 49, 50, 63-64, 69-70, 73-74, 83.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-30, 33-34, 36-37, 40, 53, 59, 61.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-18, 26-27, 33-34, 41, 47-48, 51-54, 58, 65-66, 69-70, 73, 75, 78, 80, 86-87.

Though usefulness provided a significant justification of Harriet's activity on behalf of God, Harriet worried she was too ambitious in her pursuit of usefulness and she frequently chides herself for it. In 1814 at the age of eighteen, Harriet confides to her diary that she is so concerned for the heathen, she almost wishes herself to be a man so that she might exert herself further on their behalf. She writes:

When I reflect on the multitudes of my fellow creatures who are perishing for lack of vision, and that I am living at ease, without aiding in the promulgation of the Gospel, I am almost ready to wish myself a man, that I might spend my life with the poor heathen. But I check the thought, and would not alter one plan of Infinite wisdom. I can, however, cheerfully think of enduring pain and hardship for them, and for my dear Redeemer. Has he not given his life for multitudes now perishing, as well as for my soul? And Oh, how basely ungrateful and selfish in me, to sit down quietly in the care of self, without making any exertion for their salvation. But what can I do? A weak, ignorant female. One thing only do I see, My prayers may be accepted. Yes I will plead with my heavenly Father, that he may be a Father to the poor benighted heathen.⁸¹

Later Harriet confesses her tendency to “castle-build” in a letter to a friend, and laments that her sense of “self” often takes up too much of her thoughts, time, and labor in doing good.⁸² Even after her decision to go on the mission field, Harriet continues to struggle with selfish motivations for doing so, writing that she has been “meditating on the glorious labors of a missionary” and asking that God would make her motives pure in order not to bring reproach to the cause.⁸³ Shortly before her departure she writes:

Have been thinking today of the emotion excited by seeing the word missionary. It may be accounted for on the principle of association; but is there not an idea of something great, uncommon, or distinguished connected with it, inconsistent with that humility which rejoices in doing the least thing for the good of souls, though none witness it but God? Oh that I may know myself thoroughly, in all that respects this work.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Winslow, *Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*, 23-24.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 26, 29.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

Yet not every aspect of Harriet's ambition for usefulness is identified as worthy of repentance. Harriet is unabashed in asking God to increase her sphere of usefulness, supplicating him to empower her to increase her efforts on behalf of the poor and unconverted. She writes, "The fore-part of this day, indeed, until three o'clock, was spent by me in soliciting charity with my friend L., and in visiting the poor and sick. Could my days all pass thus, methinks the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches would not choke the word, and render it unfruitful. Oh God, I pray thee enlarge my sphere of usefulness. Give me power and desire to do good continually."⁸⁵ Later Harriet once again asks God to bless her usefulness, this time requesting that he provide her with new doors through which to walk. Unafraid to take initiative both in prayer and society to seek new ways of using her abilities for God, she writes:

I again tried to day, as repeatedly before, to establish a female prayer meeting, but was unsuccessful. From an unexpected source was disappointed. I beseech thee, Oh Lord, to open to me some other door of usefulness. I feel that I could do any thing, (frail and imperfect as I am,) that would lead sinners to repent. Oh Lord, graciously be pleased to hear the feeble voice of my supplications, and make me an humble instrument in thy hands of good to the souls of men.⁸⁶

In a particularly key passage, Harriet all but leaves behind any language of female passivity and makes a declaration of her commitment to exerting all in service of God, writing:

My mind has this day been much on my little school, and my usefulness in life. What am I, Oh God, that thou art mindful of me. I have just experienced much joy in prayer. I am very desirous of being more useful to my fellow creatures. All that worldlings can offer to chain my heart to earth, will be nothing, compared with God's blessing on my feeble attempts to serve him. Life loses its charms, when I cease to think myself useful. Oh, that my life may be wholly spent in the service of my Maker. There is no hardship, no suffering, which I now think will be too much for me to endure for his glory.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Winslow, *Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*, 33-34.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

Where Harriet Newell and Myra Allen's commitment to usefulness was firmly rooted in their view of eternity, Harriet Winslow speaks little, if at all about it. For her, the language of usefulness is rooted more in a subjective understanding of self, purpose, and the joy it brings to her earthly life.

A particularly interesting feature of Harriet's memoir is the changing attitude toward missions it depicts. Harriet Winslow speaks frequently of Harriet Newell and of reading her memoir, and she is mentored throughout her decision process by Roxanna Nott, one of the original missionary wives who returned to America with her husband due to ill health.⁸⁸ However, despite this readily available knowledge of the missionary cause, Harriet's community is considerably opposed to her desire to go, insisting both that her first duty lies with her country and that women in particular should not participate in missionary activity, as well as expressing concern for her health.⁸⁹ Family members, particularly her mother, friends, and neighbors all work to persuade her against departing.⁹⁰ At one point she even describes the efforts of a gentleman to use his authority to sway her mind:

This has been a pleasant Sabbath to my soul, especially the evening. But I am now a little perplexed. Believe I mentioned in my last that Mr. --- had been to see father to advise respecting my going to the East, but did not tell you that he went so far as to say he ought to interpose authority. Not satisfied with that, he has been this evening to see mother, strengthened by the united opinion of his mother, wife, and aunt, that it is not my duty to go. In the first place, he is opposed to foreign missions, yet if any must go, he says, let them be men only. Females have no business there; and if fifty of my friends were consulted on this subject forty-nine of them would say, I ought not to go. Everything I believe he said that could be said by a violent opposer; I regret most that he is assisted by those whom I so much respect.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Winslow, *Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*, 26-27, 45-46, 63.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 49, 53-54, 63.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52, 57-58, 63, 68-69.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

Yet by the time of its publication almost two decades later, Winslow inserts his voice in order to warn the reader away from the romance of missions. In a long discourse on the subject, Winslow laments the romanticization of missions as detrimental to ensuring young women are fully equipped and ready for the field. He writes, “A young lady, who in this country may stand, perhaps, at the head of a large seminary, and take a lead in many benevolent operations, should either chasten her imagination, or invigorate her principles, before she goes forth to teach a few heathen children, or to exert an uncertain, it may be unacknowledged influence over a handful of degraded and dark minded female idolaters.”⁹² Because of the harsh realities of the mission field and the thankless toil it requires, the result of failing to check romantic impulses for going will be a reduced rather than increased usefulness. Rather than romantic inspiration, women going onto the mission field should endeavor to cultivate more pious motivations. Winslow writes, “An ardent love for souls, and a deep sense of the constraining love of Christ, will support even a delicate female any where, and enable her to ‘rejoice in tribulation also.’”⁹³

This is not the only aspect in which Harriet’s memoir depicts the changing realities of American participation in the missionary effort, and Winslow attempts to inspire his readers with more pious motivations. In addition to speaking against the rising romanticism with which women engaged missions, Winslow also writes against the dangers of fiction.⁹⁴ Winslow writes, “And certainly, if it is dangerous to form our views of common life from what we find in novels, it is more dangerous to form our notions of

⁹² Winslow, *Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*, 42.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

religion from the details of imaginary, instead of real, experience. In the former case we have to do with things obvious to our senses, in the latter with spiritual subjects; while in the one a mistake is but temporal, in the other it may be eternal.”⁹⁵ Forcefully arguing against the evils of trying to learn spiritual truth from fictional situations, rather than from the true examples of saints’ lives, Winslow puts forth the life of his wife as a better exemplar. Though he is careful not to promote her conversion narrative as a template after which readers should pattern themselves, Winslow notes the pedagogical intent behind Harriet’s narrative.⁹⁶ Written specifically for her children, and for the reader by extension due to its publication, Winslow intends for his audience to remember that Harriet’s narrative of conversion and resulting usefulness stands within a long evangelical tradition communicating spiritual truth through the example of a life lived in faith.

D. Eliza G. Jones

Eliza Grew Jones was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1803 and sailed to Burma as a missionary wife in 1830, shortly after marrying John Taylor Jones.⁹⁷ Published in 1842 and with no single author listed, Eliza’s memoir is one of the more unusual for the genre; the memoir was simply compiled, edited, and published by a committee of the American Baptist Publication and Sunday School Society. With a similar degree of restraint as Harriet Newell’s memoir, the committee interjects very little commentary or narrative, relying instead almost exclusively on Eliza’s own journals and letters. As a result, the memoir communicates very little about her early life and

⁹⁵ Winslow, *Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow*, 60.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11, 16.

⁹⁷ American Baptist Publication and Sunday School Society, *Memoir of Mrs. Eliza G. Jones, Missionary to Burmah and Siam* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication and Sunday School Society, 1842) 3, 25, Archive.org, accessed 26 September 2015.

circumstances, instead providing the reader with Eliza's own internal voice and identity. Even in the closing account of her death in 1838, the memoir's publishers are remarkably restrained from interjecting their own authorial voice, depending entirely upon the description of her death provided to her family by her husband.⁹⁸ Though the narrative pattern of the memoir clearly places it alongside those of the other missionary wives, Eliza's memoir demonstrates the variety found within the genre as it grew and developed over the two decades after the publication of Harriet Newell's memoir.

In the short introduction provided at the beginning of the memoir, Eliza is recognized for her desire for knowledge and the intellect she demonstrated. Otherwise, however, nothing is noted about her family or character and no abundance of praise is given her.⁹⁹ In fact, the editors of the memoir make it clear that the most noteworthy aspect of her early life was her conversion, stating, "...nothing of peculiar interest is to be recorded of her youthful period, until He, who gave her existence, imparted to her that boon of sovereign love which renders that existence blissful and glorious forever."¹⁰⁰ Eliza's personal conversion narrative written in a letter to a friend is the immediate focal point of the memoir.

Like the other missionary wives' narratives, Eliza first recounts an extended period of spiritual apathy followed by particular experiences of awakening. She remembers experiencing her first serious thoughts at the age of six or seven, but recalls that they were fleeting. She writes:

But the serious impressions of my childhood, although often pungent, were like the morning cloud and the early dew, which vanish away. Always ardent in my feelings, with the gay I have ever been the gayest; with the wild, the wildest; with

⁹⁸ ABPSSS, *Mrs. Eliza G. Jones*, 167-172.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

the serious, the most serious; in joy, the most elated; in sorrow, the most afflicted and if I have at any time attained a proper medium, it has cost me a great deal of pains to preserve it.¹⁰¹

Eliza lists three things that were particularly important for awakening her soul. First, she mentions the conversation of her father, a Baptist minister, and second, the recurrence of her birthday, likely a time during which she contemplated the eternal state of her soul.¹⁰² Third, and “especially,” Eliza mentions the writings of Harriet Newell, demonstrating that even before her conversion, Eliza was influenced through the evangelical textual community by the life and death of America’s hailed missionary martyr.¹⁰³

When a revival took place in her town in 1814, Eliza remembers the time surrounding it as the beginning of her true seeking. As with some of the other narratives, Eliza enters a time of intense spiritual wavering as she descends along the U-shape pattern of her narrative. During the revival Eliza believes she might be saved, but ultimately this does not bear fruit as she is incapable of “giving up the world” and subsequently loses all of her serious impressions during a visit to Boston where she “indulged in all the sin and vanity that I dared.”¹⁰⁴ Her conscience is not quiet, however; but rather than it leading her to true spiritual endeavor, Eliza recalls turning instead to a system of self-righteousness in order to attempt to convince herself all is well.¹⁰⁵ Eliza continues through more spiritual ups and downs until she starts to consider the possibility that the Spirit had departed from her entirely and she has been “given over to destruction.” Perhaps she has committed the unpardonable sin by neglecting the many

¹⁰¹ ABPSSS, *Mrs. Eliza G. Jones*, 4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

experiences of awakening already manifested in her life.¹⁰⁶ Entering into a spiritual depression, Eliza withdraws and attempts to avoid those whom she believes to be converted instead of herself, writing:

I walked alone to the house where I lodged, and retired as soon as possible, in order to avoid them but when alone in my chamber, my own thoughts became intolerable. My sins seemed to rise like waves to swallow me up; one brought another to view, and I thought that there need not be a worse hell than to be overwhelmed with a sense of guilt. All this time, my heart was at enmity with God I knew not what to do, or where to go. Punishment appeared inevitable, and punishment was all I dreaded.¹⁰⁷

Upon reaching this lowest point of the U-shape, Eliza finally starts to view God as holy, merciful, and good.¹⁰⁸ She gains hope that she might be saved after all, but continues to avoid those who might help her spiritual struggle, including her family.¹⁰⁹ After some weeks, Eliza finally experiences the ultimate surrender of conversion. She writes:

Several weeks after, as I opened my Bible, (which I was not now ashamed of,) the 26th verse of the 36th chapter of Ezekiel, met my eye, when I immediately left the room, and, bursting into tears, cried out, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." Then I could say, "my Lord and my God;" and although I have, since then, had many doubts and fears, although I have sinned and gone far astray from him, yet I think that I can say I have never entirely lost the sense of his goodness, his infinite condescension, which I felt at that moment.¹¹⁰

Though many years pass before Eliza is baptized and enters the church, she is unafraid to recount these spiritual experiences in correspondence with her close friend, a spiritually significant act for the evangelical textual community.¹¹¹

After her conversion, many aspects of Eliza's spiritual growth into usefulness are similar to those of the other missionary wives. Eliza speaks of her concern that she has

¹⁰⁶ ABPSSS, *Mrs. Eliza G. Jones*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 9, 12-13.

“misimproved” the spiritual blessings God has given her and desires to grow closer to God in order to be faithful in her service to him.¹¹² Language of duty frequents her writings, particularly in connection to the unconverted around her.¹¹³ Eliza writes:

Where is that godly jealousy, that spirit of self-denial, that watchfulness, that engagedness in prayer, that love to God, which were once in exercise? What appears in the heart which they have deserted? O black ingratitude! Worldly conformity, a spirit of levity, anger, pride, neglect of duty, and criminal stupidity, are now apparent in my thoughts, words and actions; and I am daily and hourly bringing reproach upon that religion which it should be my constant endeavor to recommend to all around me.¹¹⁴

For Eliza, a significant motivating factor for usefulness is her desire to repay Christ for his work on her behalf. Eliza speaks of her ingratitude as hindering her spiritually and seeks instead to do something for her savior, writing:

There have been times when I have felt such an ardent, inexpressible desire to do something for God; to manifest in some way my attachment to Jesus; to devote every moment of my short life to his service, that I have thought no sacrifice too great to make, no trials too severe to be endured, so that I might do some good in his cause, or be the means of the conversion of one soul. And shall I now draw back? Shall I withhold any thing from Jesus? From Him who has died to redeem me from sin by and misery; who, I trust, has renewed me by his grace, and is now preparing for me a mansion in the realms of eternal glory? No: “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.”¹¹⁵

In particular, though, Eliza closely echoes earlier missionary wives’ writings by understanding her desire for service in the light of death and eternity. With the death of an aunt, Eliza laments her own stupidity and ingratitude, asking God to wean her from the world so that she might be of greater service.¹¹⁶ Contrasting holy living with sleeping, Eliza considers how the unconverted should recognize the Christian for doing more than others as eternity lurks at the door. She writes:

¹¹² ABPSSS, *Mrs. Eliza G. Jones*, 9-10, 11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 10-11, 13-16.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

My unfaithfulness, my worldly-mindedness, my neglect of duty during the last two years are presented to my mind, and fill my soul with anguish. Why have I given the enemies of the cross so much reason to say – “what do ye more than others”? Why do I not live as Jesus Christ lived? as his saints live, or even as I once lived myself? Death hastens on apace; eternity with all its realities will soon be unfolded to my view, my day of grace will soon be over. “Arise, O sleeper, and call upon thy God.”¹¹⁷

At times Eliza even speaks of longing for death; however, like her counterparts, this longing does not produce an otherworldliness, but rather a renewed commitment to and zeal for the work of God on earth. In one particularly noteworthy passage, Eliza speaks in stark term of her longing for death, writing:

Why do my thoughts recur so frequently to death-bed scenes? Why do I look with such pleasure on the lifeless corpse, and follow with my eyes the passing hearse my thoughts almost unconsciously darting forward, with a sort of involuntary delight, to the day when it shall carry me to the house appointed for all living? Is it because I am already fitted for the holy mansions above? Is it because I cannot sustain the ills of this life, that I long to “fly away and be at rest?” Because I cannot bear the conflict with my evil heart; my carnal propensities my inordinate affections my unhallowed desires; my selfish disposition?¹¹⁸

She answers herself that whatever her reason for desiring death, it is not because she has no work to do, stating, “Do I long for heaven because I have no work to do on earth? Tongue cannot utter, thought cannot conceive, the vast extent of labor which lies before the Christian.”¹¹⁹ Eternity and its approach are not understood as excusing withdrawal from the world, but rather are key motivating factors in Eliza’s commitment to serve God.

Yet not everything about Eliza’s narrative echoes earlier narratives. Three key differences are important to note. First, Eliza does not use the terminology of “usefulness” anywhere in her pre-departure writing. Though she echoes and includes

¹¹⁷ ABPSSS, *Mrs. Eliza G. Jones*, 10-11.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

many of the key concepts of usefulness found in other memoirs, the language itself is not present until her correspondence from the mission field.¹²⁰ Second, even though the language of usefulness is not present, Eliza's memoir indicates a stronger understanding of her ability to be useful than other memoirs, or rather, Eliza speaks with greater confidence concerning what she believes God has called her to do. Whereas Harriet Winslow spoke of longing to be a man in order to demonstrate increased usefulness and service to God, Eliza speaks eloquently of her equal duty in parallel to the masculine calling of preaching. In a particularly important passage, she writes:

Were I a minister of the gospel, commissioned to proclaim salvation to a perishing world, should I wish to leave my work and go home to glory? No, the longest life would then be too short to accomplish all I should wish to do for God and my fellow sinners. But there is within my own sphere of action much more to be done than I can hope ever to accomplish; and shall I let one talent remain unoccupied because I do not possess five? Shall I wish to be dismissed from my Captain's service and go home, because I am placed in the rear of his army? Let me work while the day lasts, remembering that "the night cometh in which no man can work."¹²¹

In this passage, Eliza clearly states that she has no less duty to improve upon the talents given her as a male counterpart might have. Even though her position may not be as exulted as a minister's, she does not have less work or responsibility before God. Whereas earlier women expressed doubt concerning their usefulness, even potential desire to be male in order to locate their usefulness, Eliza is confident that within her own feminine sphere there is work to be done for God.

With this in mind, the third distinctive of Eliza's memoir is its evidence of the evangelical textual community upon which Eliza draws for her convictions concerning missionary service. In contemplating her decision to participate in the missionary cause,

¹²⁰ ABPSSS, *Mrs. Eliza G. Jones*, 36, 53, 76, 94, 117, 121.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

Eliza speaks of reading not only Harriet Newell, but also the writings of Ann Judson and Henry Martyn, as well as “Parsons and Fisk.”¹²² As she contemplates their lives, she is sure she will suffer as they did. But what is significant is that these heroes are mentioned together, without distinction given to their work. Both the men and women are viewed as worthy of veneration and emulation and are of equal importance in her decision to go on the mission field. This speaks to the strength of the evangelical textual community and the success of the missionary wives’ memoirs in disseminating earlier wives’ views on usefulness and recruiting new women to the cause. Eliza’s sense of self, purpose, and calling as a woman contemplating the mission field is perhaps stronger than that of earlier missionary wives and without any wistfulness for masculinity precisely because she has female exemplars upon which to pattern herself.

With the successive publication of missionary wives’ writings, later generations of women entered the mission field with female narratives upon which to draw for encouragement and motivation. From the lives of Ann Judson, Myra Allen, Harriet Winslow, and Eliza Jones, American women were provided with contemporary examples of how to seek “usefulness.” All four memoirs pointedly connected their subjects’ conversions with their subsequent commitment to usefulness through the missionary cause. Though some of the missionary wives, such as Myra Allen and Harriet Winslow, demonstrated significant usefulness before their departures, the memoirs’ utilization of the literary tradition surrounding conversion narratives demonstrated that what mattered most was the disposition of a woman’s heart to live usefully, as demonstrated by Ann Judson and Eliza Jones. As the memoirs themselves demonstrate, the memoirs of missionary wives were produced and published for their pedagogical potential. The genre

¹²² ABPSSS, *Mrs. Eliza G. Jones*, 21-22.

was an important part of the evangelical textual community, producing exemplars after which evangelical women could construct their spiritual identities.

Conclusion

By the mid 19th century, significant changes were underway for women's participation in the American missionary effort. Missionary boards sought to implement increased restrictions on missionary wives, encouraging them to focus solely on their families and children, in the hopes of prolonging their life expectancy. Single women were sent as missionary teachers instead in the hope that without the burden of a family they might find more success in reaching local populations. Women themselves became more organized in their support of foreign missions, starting their own mission boards and raising their own funds. As the century progressed, the slogan "Women's Work for Women" became a popular rallying cry for women involved in missionary activity, demonstrating the extent to which women claimed ownership of the cause within their particular sphere.¹

How should we understand this movement? Was women's participation and increased ownership of the American missionary effort an act of subversion against antebellum social norms? In some cases, this explanation rings true; yet in most, it hardly seems fitting. When listening to the voices of the women involved in such activities, one most often finds a conservativeness pertaining to the roles of women. Most women involved in missionary efforts were compelled first by evangelical spiritual motivations, which seem to have slowly, over time, and in some cases inadvertently, opened new doors for women's roles in antebellum America. As women became more confident in the belief they were called to be useful, and as their writing, published with the approval

¹ R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980). Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996).

of male interlocutors, inspired younger generations to seek similar usefulness, the Edwardsian message of disinterested benevolence and the approaching millennial age was contextualized for the woman's sphere.

By studying the use of traditional literary patterns in the memoirs of missionary wives, this paper has examined the importance of each woman's conversion narrative as it justified her search for usefulness and commitment to the missionary cause. I have demonstrated how the individual experiences of the first missionary wives were replicated in the lives of younger generations through participation in an evangelical textual community, and how the powerful intersection of literary traditions surrounding conversion narratives with the social and theological environment of the New Divinity encouraged women to implement what they learned and read into their lives. As stated in my introduction, the first missionary wives opened new doors for women not out of a desire to reject evangelical ideas, but rather out of a desire to submit to what they perceived to be God's will according to the gendered social context within which they lived.

Perhaps contextualization, or recontextualization, is an important missing component for understanding the paradox of the conservativeness with which women engaged missions and the new horizons such engagement introduced. If gender is one of the first differentiators within a culture, then it is not inappropriate to speak of antebellum women's culture, rather than a sphere; and as the rising field of World Christianity is quick to remind us, the Christian message continually finds renewed power and meaning as it is translated into new social and cultural contexts. As new cultural demographics

engage the Christian message for themselves, they translate it for their own spheres in ways cultural outsiders could not have predicted.²

It is true that antebellum America witnessed a significant restriction of many aspects of women's lives; however, this is not how the women in this study perceived their situation. Rather, the first missionary wives believed themselves to be living in a period of great female opportunity, based mostly on the increased educational opportunities women in 19th century New England experienced. Due to their increased ability to read and write and engagement of a textual community, many women felt their worlds expanding, not contracting. Through these newfound abilities to engage the Christian message, women contextualized it for their particular cultural realities, interpreting it according to antebellum social thought. Contextualization of the Christian message involves an interpretation of the existing social realities according to the larger narrative of the Christian scriptures, and the involvement of women in the American missionary effort is one example of the gender-specific ways in which this might happen.

Though I suggest this interpretation only as one possible way of reading the history of women's involvement with American missions, I believe it bears out when considering the memoirs of the first missionary wives. As these memoirs sought to situate themselves within the evangelical literary canon, they relied on the use of earlier literary traditions reinterpreted for antebellum evangelicalism. They displayed a loyalty to the conversion narrative pattern as established by the Puritans, but utilized such patterns according to the New Divinity context, demonstrating an ability to contextualize earlier

² Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996). Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

narratives for contemporary purposes. Ordained male editors were instrumental for the publication of such accounts, yet there is evidence that women themselves produced and engaged these narratives apart from their male interlocutors. Women read and wrote within the broader evangelical textual community, creating identities for themselves that spoke powerfully and pedagogically to other women.

At the heart of this recontextualization of the Christian message for antebellum evangelical women stood Harriet Newell. Though only a quiet and pious young woman who died at nineteen years old, Harriet deeply understood and internalized the message of disinterested benevolence that her New Divinity ministers, teachers, and associates preached, contextualizing it within her life as a search for usefulness in the world. Believing that eternity beckoned as the new millennial age dawned, Harriet interpreted the woman's sphere in which she lived according to what she engaged in scripture – something her foremothers would have had limited capacity to do without the degree of textual community Harriet enjoyed.

Upon her death, Harriet's greatest concern was to communicate with those back home that she did not regret her decision to participate in the missionary cause. Nor did she feel guilt or regret over the briefness of her time in missionary service. After all, Harriet did not understand her usefulness according to the degree of her productivity and output; rather, usefulness was first and foremost a disposition of the heart – a willingness to give as one could to God. As Harriet stated upon her death bed:

I wish to do something for God before I die. But the experience I have had of the deceitfulness of my heart leads me to expect, that if I should recover, my future life would be much the same as my past has been, and I long to be perfectly free from sin. God has called me away before we have entered on the work the

mission, but the case of David affords me comfort; I have had it in my heart to do what I can for the heathen, and I hope God will accept me.³

In the years which followed Harriet's death, evangelicals published dozens of memoirs dedicated to missionary wives with the hope that the genre would continue to teach and inspire young American women toward conversion and usefulness. Modeled on Harriet Newell's memoir, this new genre impacted the evangelical textual community as publishers hoped and inspired many young women to similar lives of usefulness. The first missionary wife memoirs provide us with a glimpse into the ongoing contextualization of conversion and usefulness among young evangelical women. The memoirs of Harriet Newell, Ann Judson, Myra Allen, Harriet Winslow, and Eliza Jones all exemplify both the reception of common evangelical ideas into the lives of their subjects, and the creation of new identities which enabled women to engage the missionary cause.

³ Leonard Woods, D.D., *A Sermon, Preached at Haverhill, Mass. In Remembrance of Mrs. Harriet Newell, Wife of the Rev. Samuel Newell, Missionary to India. Who Died at the Isle of France, Nov. 30, 1812, Aged 19 Years. To Which Are Added Memoirs of Her Life* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1814), 150-151, Archive.org, accessed 16 September 2016.

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VITA

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This work is dedicated to Trey, a better friend than I could ever have hoped to find on this side of eternity.

And to Verity. May you live in grace and grow in usefulness.

gospel were not taken away from cold Christians who neglect their savior and given to the heathen who had never heard.¹³

A little more than a year later, Harriet was shocked when her friend Ann personally announced her decision to leave America as a missionary. She wrote, "I have felt more for the salvation of the heathen this day, than I recollect to have felt through my whole past life."¹⁴ Ann's decision became a catalyst for Harriet's own consideration of missions, "What heart but would bleed at the idea of the sufferings they endure, to obtain the joys of Paradise? What can I do, that the light of the gospel may shine upon them? They are perishing for lack of knowledge, when I enjoy the glorious privileges of a Christian land. Great God, direct me! Oh, make me in some way beneficial to their immortal souls!"¹⁵ Shaping up to be a great year of change for Harriet, she was introduced to Samuel Newell three days after Ann's announcement. Knowing that he planned to spend his life preaching among "the pagans," her encounter with Newell was a further catalyst in the self-examination of her duties to renounce the world and become useful to the heathen.¹⁶

As Harriet and Ann prepared to leave America and sail for India, no official policy existed regarding wives.¹⁷ Many were opposed to the idea, but it seems Adoniram was particularly insistent on not departing unmarried.¹⁸ In many respects, the first American overseas missionaries attempted to model themselves off of William Carey,

¹³ Woods, *A Sermon*, 49.

¹⁴ Ibid., 65.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹⁷ Dana L. Robert, "The Influence of American Missionary Women on the World Back Home," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 12, No. 1 (Winter, 2002), 61.

¹⁸ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 18.